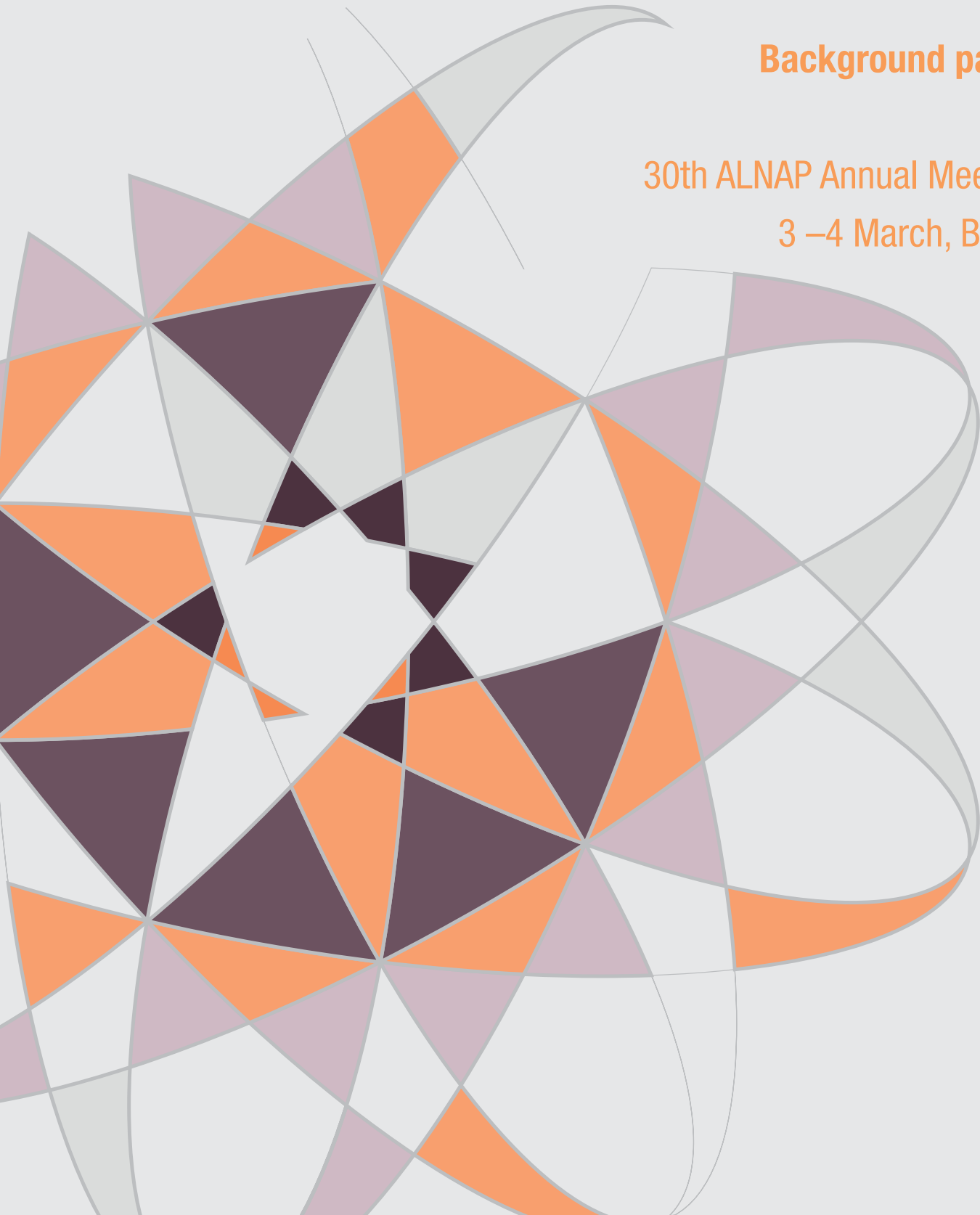# ALNAP

Working together in the field for effective humanitarian response

Background paper

30th ALNAP Annual Meeting

3 – 4 March, Berlin

ALNAP is a unique system-wide network dedicated to improving the performance of humanitarian action through shared learning. **www.alnap.org**

Have you read the **ALNAP discussion starter** that accompanies this study?

An electronic copy of the study, the discussion starter and other related resources are available on the ALNAP website at **www.alnap.org/meeting2015.**

Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ADRRN	Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CALP	Cash Learning Partnership
CAP	Consolidated Appeal Process
CAR	Central African Republic
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
CoP	Community of Practice
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DREP	Disaster Response Engagement Protocols
EC	European Commission
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building Project
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
EWS	Early Warning Systems
FTS	Financial Tracking System
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCM	Inter-Cluster Coordination Mechanism
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICS	Incident Command System
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MIRA	Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PoP	Principles of Partnership
RTE	Real-time evaluation
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group
SOHS	The state of the humanitarian system
STAIT	Strategic Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

Humanitarian responses often involve large numbers of national and international actors who frequently work in the same geographical areas and towards the same broad goals. However, coordination and collaboration among them are often limited at best. Failure to work together can lead to gaps in coverage and to duplications and inefficiencies in any given emergency response.

This is an issue that has become more pressing. A combination of factors – climate change, urbanisation and population growth, among others – means that many emergencies are now much larger and more complex than before. This in turn has led to responses becoming larger and more complex. No single agency can meet all needs, even in a specific sector. The number and diversity of humanitarian actors have also increased, which can make coordination seem an almost impossible task.

The past decade has seen a variety of approaches to improve the way in which we work together. In 2005 the Humanitarian Reform Agenda began to introduce the Cluster Approach and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs), which were aimed at enhancing coordination at the country level. In addition, many countries have active non-governmental organisation (NGO) coordination bodies. Many organisations work in partnership with one another and – increasingly – with non-traditional humanitarian actors, such as the private sector, in the planning and execution of relief operations.

From these initiatives have come many success stories that outline the benefits of working together; however, a number of significant challenges have also emerged. It is not easy to achieve coordination and collaboration: competing organisational interests can pull agencies in different directions; differing languages and cultures can impede rapid communication and understanding; coordination can compromise organisational independence; and the time and energy required for successful coordination can prove daunting, particularly for smaller organisations.

At the same time there are coherent arguments against too much coordination or collaboration. 'Humanitarian aid should be left purposely outside comprehensive approaches, integrated solutions and sustainability or resilience objectives' argues Whittall (2014: 2), because coordination allows political actors to control the humanitarian agenda. '[In] recent years there has been broader acknowledgement that the specificities of humanitarian coordination need greater protection from political agendas' (Donini, 2008: 23).

Research and evaluations have addressed some – but by no means all – of these experiences of coordination. With humanitarian needs projected to grow, we can expect coordination and working together to become even more important in the years ahead. For this reason, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) has decided to meet to take stock so as to be able to share experiences and best practices on working together in the field to ensure effective humanitarian responses. This, then, is the central theme of ALNAP's 2015 Annual Meeting and an issue at the centre of the debates on how to improve the way in which diverse humanitarian actors can meet the needs of people affected by crises.

This paper looks at the variety of ways that different organisations work together at the country level. It considers bilateral relations between organisations (partnerships), as well as relations among multiple organisations (clusters, networks and consortiums). It also looks at other, non-structural, modalities used to support working together, such as funding mechanisms and standards.

The paper considers the following actors: international and national NGOs; United Nations (UN) agencies, offices, funds and programmes; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; government authorities; donors; and the private sector. It does not consider civil-military coordination or look at coordination bodies and approaches at the regional and global levels.

> "
> With humanitarian needs projected to grow, we can expect coordination and working together to become even more important in the years ahead.
> "

2. Coordination in context: are humanitarians moving closer together or further apart?

2.1 An increasingly atomised humanitarian system?

The international humanitarian system is a 'network of national and international provider agencies, donors and host-government authorities that are functionally connected to each other in the humanitarian endeavour and that share common overarching goals, norms and principles' (ALNAP, 2012: 8). Perhaps its two most salient features are its size – in terms of the number of organisations involved – and its (increasing) diversity: 'The international humanitarian system – even narrowly defined … is larger and more diverse than many realise' (ALNAP, 2012: 28).

The system is 'made up of many different moving parts, each with different comparative advantages, different interests and different capacities' (Scott, 2014: 1). According to ALNAP's 2012 edition of *The state of the humanitarian system* (SOHS), in 2009-2010 over 4,400 operational organisations, working in various combinations, responded to 103 natural disasters and 43 complex emergencies (Financial Tracking System data). These included governmental, inter-governmental and international, national and local civil society organisations (CSOs). In many situations 'non-traditional' actors, such as those from the private sector (international or, very often, national or local) or the military, joined them in the effort.

In some cases the large number of organisations involved makes any form of coherent or coordinated action almost impossible. More challenging than the sheer number of active organisations, however, are the differences among them: 'traditional' humanitarian actors manifest significant differences of emphasis in terms of how to approach humanitarian aid. These are based largely on mandate and philosophy. One of the most salient differences appears to be between (1) those – broadly 'Dunantist'[1] – organisations that focus on immediate responses to the suffering that disasters and conflicts cause and that prioritise direct contact with those who are suffering; and (2) those organisations that tend to see humanitarian action in the broader context of long-term vulnerabilities and that, as a result, aim to build local capacity and engage in resilience work, often as part of a broader, state-led development agenda (see Saavedra, 2014; Whittall, 2014).

1   The term refers to Henry Dunant, ""who inspired the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It generally refers to those organisations whose strategies and operations are most strongly influenced by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

While this tension is not new, it has been brought into sharp relief in recent years. The factors behind this include a growth in interest in 'resilience'; the increased capacity and presence of government actors in many disaster contexts; and, arguably, attempts to create a single, undifferentiated and agreed model of humanitarian action, one that is as valid for response to conflict in stateless societies as it is for preparation for and response to natural disasters in democratic and representative states (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014). In addition, humanitarian aid has seen increased politicisation, for example in Somalia and Afghanistan, as a result of donors also being combatants, imposing constraints on the way in which aid is used. This has led to threats to the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality and to disagreements between organisations that have been prepared to accept funding from such donors and those that, to preserve their independence, have not.

In addition to these tensions among traditional actors, a number of 'newly acknowledged' humanitarian actors – particularly those from middle-income countries – are bringing 'new' approaches and philosophies to humanitarian action.[2] In many circumstances humanitarian agencies may also be working with non-humanitarian actors (such as the private sector) whose primary organisational motivation is not to respond to humanitarian imperatives.

Finally, in a situation where needs outstrip resources and where a large number of humanitarian actors are entering the field, such actors find themselves in increased competition for funding, for trained and experienced staff, and for access to the media and decision-makers. While these tensions are more prosaic than those produced by differing mandates and philosophies, they are no less real.

This is not to say that efforts at collaboration or coordination are doomed to fail: despite the difficult backdrop, there can often be real benefits in working together, ones that overcome some of the general tendencies towards atomisation mentioned above. Section 2.2 analyses some of these potential benefits, while section 2.3 highlights some of the challenges to and constraints on coordinated and collaborative approaches.

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2   Although there are valid questions as to how different the various cultural approaches to humanitarian action actually are: as is often the case in these conversations there is a possibility that differences have been overstated and commonalities ignored. See, for example, comments in the 2012 SOHS (ALNAP, 2012) on the similarities between the principles espoused by Islamic humanitarian organisations and those laid out in the Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in disaster response programmes.

2.2 Potential benefits of working together

Cooperation and coordination are not ends in themselves. Rather, working together means that humanitarian organisations can obtain tangible benefits. In this section we look at some of those most often cited in research and evaluations. We organise the potential benefits according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria for the evaluation of humanitarian performance (Beck, 2006). The aim is to show how different approaches undertaken by different types of organisations may lead to different results.

Coverage

Coverage refers to the need to reach all people in need, wherever they are.

In a context of increased humanitarian need, coverage is a key criterion for measuring humanitarian response performance. The following represent some ways in which working together has led to improved coverage:

- Most crises that require international assistance are too large for any one organisation to address. By working together, organisations can cover broad geographical areas and address a variety of sectoral needs. For example, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) intensified appeals to the international community after the declaration of the Ebola outbreak in Guinea in March 2014, underlining the importance of a multi-agency response.

- Working in clusters and other coordination bodies has been shown to be an effective way to avoid geographical and sectoral duplication and to decrease the gaps in a response. The *Cluster approach evaluation 2* notes that these types of organisations

FIGURE 1. THE DIVERSE ACTORS INVOLVED IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE
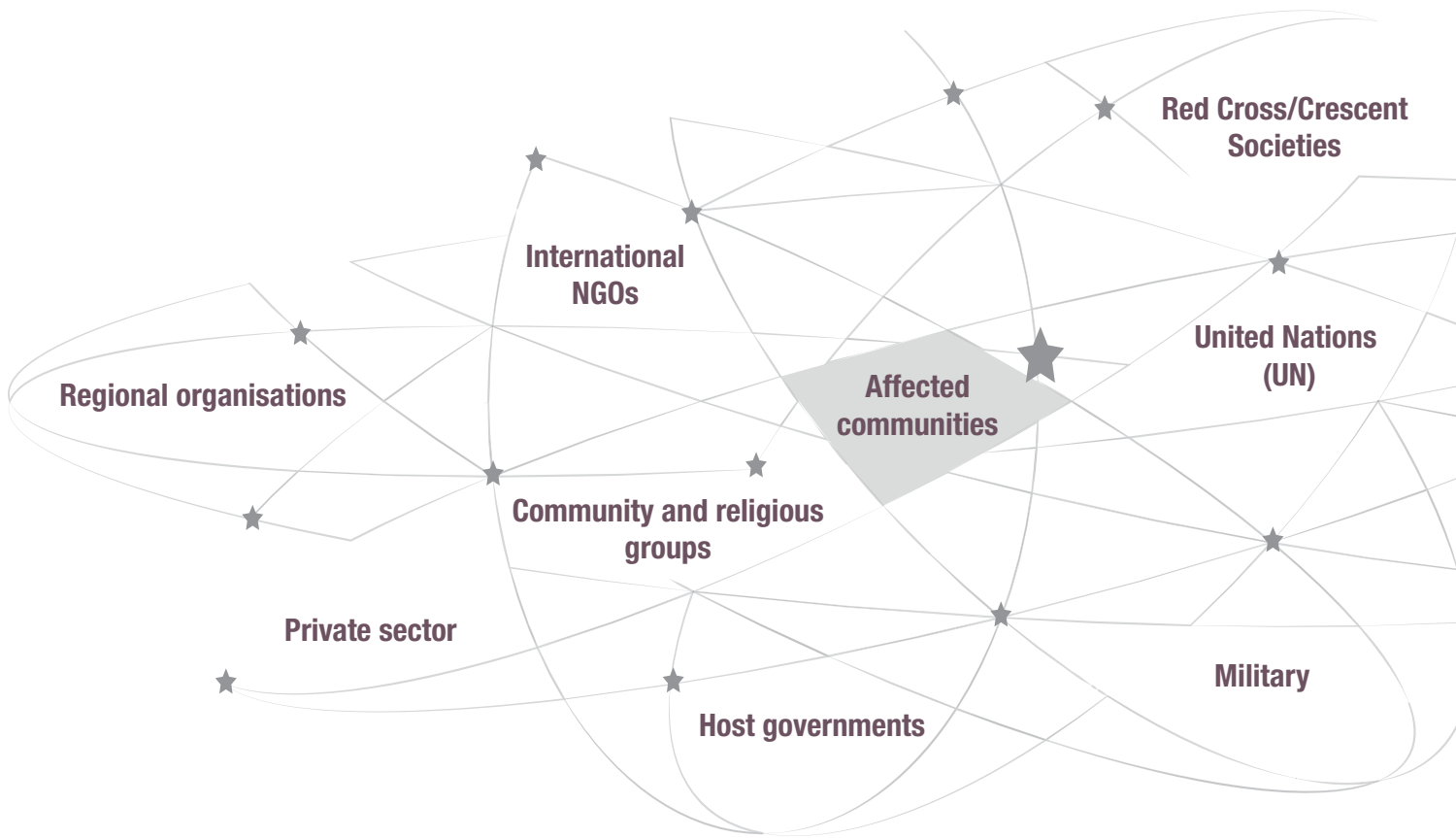
Red Cross/Crescent
Societies

International
NGOs

United Nations
(UN)

Regional organisations

Affected
communities

Community and religious
groups

Private sector

Military

Host governments

"

By working with local NGOs and civil society groups international actors can obtain information about affected people and areas and also gain access to affected people in situations where security or political constraints hinder an international presence.

"

National NGOs

play an important role in reducing duplications, which improves efficiency and allows greater coverage with the same resources … in DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], [thematic] coverage of protection, WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene], education and nutrition, as well as the provision of logistic services, also increased clearly. (Steets et al., 2000: 55)

By working with local NGOs and civil society groups, international actors can obtain information about affected people and areas and also gain access to affected people in situations where security or political constraints hinder an international presence. For example, by working in partnership with national organisations international actors were able to successfully provide large-scale cash-based programming projects in Somalia (Truelove and Ducalf, 2012).[3]

Effectiveness

This criterion measures the extent to which an activity achieves its stated purpose. Implicit in the idea of effectiveness is the idea of timeliness, not only in terms of the speed of a response, but also in terms of the capacity to adapt humanitarian responses to the changes in context and evolution of needs.

A key determinant of effectiveness is knowledge, i.e. having information that indicates that in a given context a certain set of activities is likely to lead to specific desirable outcomes. Working together can improve knowledge gained through information and learning in a variety of ways:

• It can lead to improved performance in key phases of project cycle management. For example, during assessment the inclusion of local actors as first responders enables the provision of timely vital information. Another example relates to evaluation that focuses on collective rather than project results. Focusing on the results and impacts on affected populations globally instead of at the individual agency level contributes to an understanding of linkages rather than simply plotting needs. Shared learning through the identification, documentation and dissemination of lessons learned[4] helps inform future responses.

3   As part of the Humanitarian Coalition East Africa Drought Appeal, including CARE, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Quebec, Plan and Save the Children.

4   For example, ALNAP produces and disseminates lessons learned around a diverse typology of disasters. See http://www.alnap.org/what-we-do/lessons for details.

- The fact of working together – in HCTs, clusters, coordination bodies, networks and so forth – creates higher levels of communication and so makes more information available to humanitarian actors, allowing them to make more informed decisions. According to the real-time evaluation of Department for International Development (DFID)-funded humanitarian programmes in the Sahel in 2013-2014, by addressing diagnosis, decision-making and resource allocation effectiveness, in countries like Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger,

  > significant progress has been made in the Sahel in the area of food crisis prediction and diagnosis. National and regional Early Warning Systems … are in place and most DFID-funded partners are either involved in these or take their warnings into account when preparing and designing intervention schemes. (Grunewald et al., 2014: 17)

- Working together can improve effectiveness by increasing the speed of response – such as international NGOs working with national NGOs that are closer to the ground (Hedlund and Knox Clarke, 2011). Similarly, private sector actors may be able to respond more rapidly than international actors reliant on receiving donor funding.

Working together can help improve learning and sharing of good practice. Clusters often disseminate guidance and best practice and can serve as hubs for learning and improvement. In partnerships, NGOs can learn from one another and build mutual capacity.

Efficiency

This criterion measures how inputs (usually financial, human, technical and material resources) convert into outputs.

In a context of increased crises – in terms of both number and intensity – and heightened competition for resources, calls to increase the efficiency of humanitarian responses are both understandable and frequent. Examples of the potential benefits of working together from an efficiency perspective include the following:

- The local provision of aid can be cheaper. By working with local NGOs, international actors can often achieve decreased project costs (Ramalingam et al., 2013).

- Where local organisations are involved in a response, they may be better placed to identify and prevent corruption (Featherstone, 2013).

- Coordinated procurement and service activities can reduce duplication and achieve economies of scale. A good example of this is the coordinated provision of services through the Logistics Cluster (Majewski et al., 2012).

- Where market facilities exist, coordination with the local private sector and using the market as a distribution mechanism may be more efficient. According to the Good Practice Review on cash transfer programming in emergencies, 'Generally, evaluations have found that, if given adequate warning, traders respond quickly, and market mechanisms are often surprisingly effective and robust, even in remote areas and areas affected by conflict' (Harvey and Bailey, 2011: 30).

- Long-term partnerships with national NGOs and government development agencies (see also 'Connectedness', in the next page) may allow for higher levels of preparedness work, which in some contexts has been shown to be more cost effective than emergency response (Hedlund and Knox Clarke, 2011).

Relevance and appropriateness

Relevance and appropriateness are complementary criteria that can be used at different levels (Beck, 2006), with the former assessing how well humanitarian activities are tailored to local needs, particularly around the formulation of programme/project objectives, and the latter putting the accent on several critical cross-cutting issues, such as the degree of participation, gender analysis, protection concerns and so forth. In both cases understanding of the context where humanitarian response is taking place and adaptability to its specificities are paramount.

Arguments to work together for a more relevant and appropriate humanitarian response include the following:

- Humanitarian crises are complex and generate a range of specific and varied needs among affected groups and populations. This leads to the presence of a number of specialised humanitarian actors. Coordination is required to ensure that these diverse specialisations address the crisis holistically and are appropriately adapted to each context.

- Working together, particularly between international and national actors, can lead to a better understanding of affected people's perceptions of their needs and priorities. For instance, partnerships between international and national/local organisations potentially enhance the understanding of context and local specificities, facilitating more appropriate interventions (Ramalingam et al., 2013). At the same time international organisations can bring additional professional expertise and knowledge of international standards. Where local and professional knowledge are combined in this way, responses can be more relevant and appropriate.

- Designing cash- and market-based responses, often in collaboration with local private sector actors, can lead to programmes that give affected people more agency and the opportunity to choose the goods that are right for them. For instance, during the East African drought in 2011-2012 Kenyan firms became involved in cash transfer initiatives, livestock insurance arrangements and other forms of support. These helped mitigate vulnerability among affected populations while generating income for the businesses involved (Drummond and Crawford, 2014, cited in Zyck and Kent, 2014).

> " Working together, particularly between international and national actors, can lead to a better understanding of affected people's perceptions of their needs and priorities. "

Connectedness

This criterion is an adaptation of the concept of sustainability. It relates to the extent to which short-term emergency response steps take the longer-term problems of poverty, vulnerability and development into account.[5]

Central to connectedness is improved coordination with government authorities – putting into practice UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (see section 4.1) – that allows better connectedness to broader development planning:

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5   While connectedness is one of the OECD-DAC criteria, it is important to note that to date there has been no consensus on the exact extent to which humanitarian action should support longer-term needs (Beck, 2006) and that, depending on who is asked, responses to questions on this topic will vary.

- Working with government, civil society and development actors can help to ensure a smooth transition between the various phases of the disaster cycle and ensure that activities with long-term implications – such as resettlement and the establishment/renovation of health and education facilities – fit with longer-term planning.

- In some contexts working with government can also help to improve the legitimacy of government in the eyes of the population, and develop and reinforce its central role as the leader in future humanitarian responses.

- Working with CSOs can help to reinforce and build the capacities of these actors at the local and national levels. These organisations can then more positively contribute to civil society.

Coherence

Coherence is the degree to which the activities of the various actors participating in a humanitarian response aim to achieve the same objectives and follow the same policies. A key consideration here is the degree to which these objectives and policies are in line with humanitarian and human rights law. As Beck (2006: 34) notes, coherence 'has proved the most difficult of the DAC criteria to operationalize and it is often confused with coordination'.

In many cases organisations may see a tension between collaborative work (particularly where it involves working closely with government authorities or the military) and humanitarian principles, in particular the principles of independence and neutrality. However, there are examples of joint work supporting humanitarians to ensure that their activities and those of others cohere with humanitarian principles:

- Working together on joint advocacy initiatives around humanitarian principles can prove more effective than working as a single agency. Examples include joint advocacy work around negotiated access to affected people and the application of relevant international law for the protection of people affected by crisis.

- Working with non-traditional humanitarian actors can present an opportunity to educate these actors in humanitarian and human rights principles.

2.3 Potential challenges of working together and critiques of greater coordination

The potential benefits mean that there is general agreement on the need for some level of coordination in humanitarian action and broad acceptance that the responsibility to coordinate applies to all humanitarian actors, not only 'officially mandated governmental and inter-governmental bodies' (Currion and Hedlund, 2010: 2). However, coordination can be difficult to achieve. There is also a variety of coherent arguments against the idea of 'too much coordination'.

Potential challenges and difficulties

The humanitarian sector is one with multiple actors who often compete for funds, visibility and scale of operations. In 1999, van Brabant identified several common obstacles to successful coordination. These remain relevant today: differences in organisational mandates; tension between the time required for coordination and the speed required in acute emergencies; institutional resistance to creating yet another 'layer of bureaucracy'; and acknowledgement that coordination has a cost – sometimes a very significant one – in terms of time and staff.

The capacity and willingness to invest resources, particularly time and dedicated staff, have significant implications for the success of coordination and collaboration. Meanwhile, even when the will exists, there are trade-offs between actively engaging in coordination and responding to immediate needs; these have an influence on priorities. One NGO emergency manager in Bangui[6] acknowledged that 'Between cluster sectorial meetings, NGO coordination bodies and bilateral meetings, presence in the field and close-up management of emergency teams often get less time and attention; it is a difficult choice'.

Another practical constraint to coordination in an international sector is the challenge of language – in terms of both spoken languages and 'humanitarian jargon'. In many circumstances national actors and 'non-traditional' actors can find it difficult to understand or communicate with international staff. In addition, cultural barriers, including differences in work culture and the need to overcome stereotypes and clichés and demonstrate alignment with common goals, can lead to real barriers to collaboration.

> "
> The capacity and willingness to invest resources, particularly time and dedicated staff, have significant implications for the success of coordination and collaboration.
> "

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6   Personal communication, August 2014.

A final constraint can be the sheer numbers of actors involved in many humanitarian crises. In most cases, working with everybody concerned will be neither feasible nor practical.

Conceptual challenges and critiques

There are also strong arguments against the very idea of working closely together.

The first is that in the humanitarian sector significant power disparities exist between different organisations and different types of organisations. Where less-powerful organisations work with more powerful ones there is a danger that this will force the former to compromise on their objectives or principles. This has been an issue for many NGOs in situations where country coordination structures are related to UN-integrated missions (which contain peacekeeping and political actors, as well as humanitarians) or in situations where the donor states that are funding humanitarian action are also combatants.

In both cases, organisations may – legitimately – be concerned that they will be unable to work in a neutral and independent way and that coordination will lead to 'reduced humanitarian access, subordination of humanitarian priorities, perceived loss of neutrality and increased insecurity' (Donini, 2008: 20).

The same concern arises when humanitarian organisations work closely with the state (a trend that is increasing as a result of more effective state institutions in many contexts and increased adherence to a resilience agenda). Working with the state – especially, but not exclusively, in situations where the state is a combatant in an armed conflict or is otherwise implicated in causing the humanitarian crisis – also creates real concerns around the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality. However, as in most cases, it is neither practical nor desirable for agencies to work entirely separately from government; what is needed is a more sophisticated *modus operandi* (Harvey, 2010).

Another concern that arises over 'too much coordination' is the danger of organisations losing their distinctive personalities and approaches and becoming 'homogenised'. While homogeneity might increase efficiency, it can also decrease debate, options and innovation and – over time – lead to a form of system-wide 'groupthink'.

3. Understanding inter-organisational collaboration: different typologies

As previously stated, there are many different forms and degrees of 'working together' in the humanitarian system. Section 3.1 considers different ways of working together on a spectrum of increasing coordination.

3.1 The spectrum of humanitarian coordination: different levels of working together

Humanitarian organisations work together in a wide variety of ways, from informal information sharing to the merging of resources, with a wide variety of coordination types in between. Such diversity exists that, even in one general coordination structure (a 'partnership', say, or a cluster), the nature of the coordination process can vary significantly from place to place.

It is not surprising, then, that there is a broad vocabulary of terms to describe the ways in which organisations in the humanitarian sector work together: collaboration, partnership, interoperability, information sharing, working as one, coordination, etc.

For example, in the formulation of its objectives, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Strategy for 2014-2017 distinguishes between coordination (mechanisms) and interoperability.

Below we attempt to make some sense of these terms by introducing a typology that outlines the various degrees of working together.[7] The aim is to help humanitarian actors consider the various ways in which they work together, making it possible to reflect on these relationships (and their usefulness/effectiveness) and identify what type is best suited to a specific context and best practice in terms of making these working relationships effective.

> "
> Humanitarian organisations work together in a wide variety of ways, from informal information sharing to the merging of resources, with a wide variety of coordination types in between. It is not surprising, then, that there is a broad vocabulary of terms to describe this.
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7   Based on Knox Clarke and Campbell (forthcoming). The phenomenon of various degrees of coordination in the humanitarian sector has been noted elsewhere (Grunewald et al., 2010; Staples, 2011).
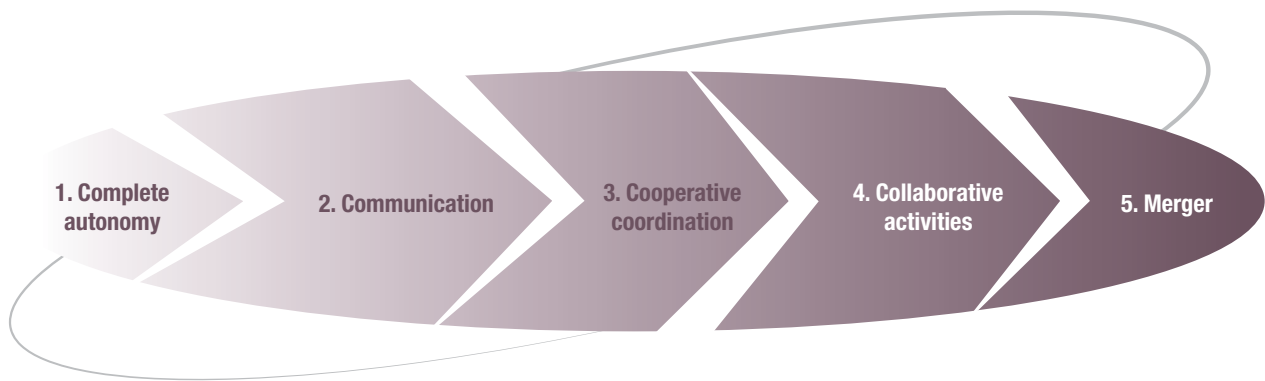
For the purposes of this paper we identify 'coordination' (which the Oxford English Dictionary describes as 'the organisation of the different elements of a complex body or activity so as to enable them to work together effectively') as the overarching term to encompass these different relationships, all of which are different ways and degrees of organisation to enable some type of coordinated activity.

In this typology three types of coordination fall within the two extremes of, at one end of the range, complete autonomy (no coordination) and, at the other, complete merger (actors that are no longer coordinating because they have become a single entity). We can broadly differentiate the different types by considering the amount of commitment, time, resources, and formality involved and the amount of organisational autonomy lost. In general, the higher the commitment, the higher the degree of formality and the greater the loss of autonomy.

At the **communication** stage, organisations share information with one another, with no specific requirement to take the exchanged information into account in their own work. There is generally a low time and resource cost, and relationships are usually quite informal. Because the organisations sharing information are under no obligation to use this information in any way, there is almost no loss of autonomy. However, information sharing can become more formalised when organisations, for example, agree on common reporting tools or indicators to use when sharing information, thus shifting their own individual practices to work in conjunction with others. At this point, communication starts to evolve into the next way of working together.

Cooperative coordination can involve a variety of activities, from agreeing to follow common guidelines/standards to gathering information through joint assessments or evaluations, moving the location of programmes, or changing their content to reduce gaps and duplications. These activities generally concern the 'where', 'what' and 'how' of humanitarian response, although they normally focus on one or two of these areas and do not attempt to regulate or affect all three. They are more formalised than sharing information and require organisations to make more of a commitment to contributing to the process and adjusting their own plans to fit any group decision.

FIGURE 2. SPECTRUM OF COORDINATION

| 1. Complete autonomy | 2. Communication | 3. Cooperative coordination | 4. Collaborative activities | 5. Merger |

However, cooperative coordination still leaves organisations with a very high degree of autonomy. While organisations are more likely to hold one another to account, agreements are generally non-binding and continually negotiable. They also tend to affect only some aspects of work – such as location or technical aspects of programming – leaving organisations free to work as they wish in other respects. When cooperation simultaneously involves the activities that organisations will undertake, their locations, and the methods and approaches they will use, it turns into collaboration.

Collaborative activities are formalised, and generally involves organisations aligning strategies and work plans so that, while maintaining their own independence, they carry out activities together. Because organisations that collaborate with each other work to a single plan, they will tend to have agreed on the 'what', 'how' and 'where' of activities, and to have gone into more detail on common methods and techniques than have agencies that are merely being cooperative. These agreements will tend to be formalised, while collaborating agencies may well share resources among themselves.

Of course, there are limitations to any attempt to categorise relationships that are diverse and continuously evolving. These three categories represent 'ideal types'; the reality is messier.

> " We identify a spectrum of coordination with three types falling within two extremes: at one end of the range, complete autonomy (no coordination) and, at the other, complete merger (actors that are no longer coordinating because they have become a single entity). "

For example, Shaxson and Clench (2011), when looking for appropriate methodologies to analyse and evaluate complex and distributed partnerships in the public policy arena, refer to the concept of 'messy partnerships', which can cast light on the coordination spectrum for humanitarians. A messy partnership 'cannot be assumed to have some stable identity that can be held to account externally for the totality of its actions' (Gujit, 2008, cited in Shaxson and Clench, 2011: 2). 'Messy partnerships are fluid: new organisations or coalitions may emerge and their visions for change need to be integrated with other partners' understandings of the policy goals and how to achieve them' (Shaxson and Clench, 2011: 2).

Furthermore, within each of the types there is a spectrum of activities. For example, some groups of organisations may agree broad guidelines that they may or may not choose to follow; others may sign formal, binding agreements to adhere to strict rules around specific ways of working (e.g. in shelter or nutrition activities). Under the typology identified above, both of these fall somewhere within 'cooperation', but there is quite a difference between them. At the same time, a coordination group – such as a cluster or network – may attempt a variety of different types of coordination, some of which are mostly about communication, some of which are aimed more at collaboration. And a single organisation will likely enter into a variety of different types of relationships with different actors, with each relationship at a different place on this spectrum.

For the purposes of the ALNAP 2015 Annual Meeting it is important to remember that not all types of coordination are the same: they involve different levels of investment, promise different degrees of returns (because – in theory at least – more collaborative relationships should provide more of the benefits outlined in section 2.2 than do relationships that aim purely at communication) and require different types of support to be successful.

3.2 Factors influencing position on the spectrum

In general, organisations will position themselves in different places on this spectrum depending on the context: an organisation may restrict itself to communication in some situations, but contemplate collaboration in others. Several factors help determine the choice in any given situation; these are discussed below.

Context

Some contexts appear to be more conducive than others to coordinated approaches. Coordination in response to natural disasters is arguably 'easier' than coordination in complex emergencies, particularly armed conflicts, because environments in the latter type of emergency tend to be more politically charged and can generate tensions among the diverse actors in the humanitarian response.

In contexts of armed conflict there are often tensions between short-tem, life-saving activities and longer-term objectives associated with peace- and state-building. These tensions will influence the degree of coordination that occurs, because some humanitarian actors are reluctant to align themselves with political aims (Stobbaerts et al., 2007) and to risk an erosion of their independence. Challenges in implementing the Capstone Doctrine (UNDPKO, 2008: 23), which aims to 'provide a framework for ensuring that all UN and other international actors pursue their activities at the country-level in a coherent and coordinated manner', provide a concrete example of such difficulties.

Complex emergencies associated with war and armed conflict can also lead to circumstances in which agencies are not prepared to share (sensitive) information, as in Iraq: 'Insecurity and uncertainty have engendered a culture of secrecy among many actors in the humanitarian community. This impairs effective coordination, stifles discussion of common strategies, and inhibits the ethos of transparency associated with humanitarian work' (Donini, 2008: 21).

"

Coordination in response to natural disasters is arguably 'easier' than coordination in complex emergencies, particularly armed conflicts, because environments in the latter type of emergency tend to be more politically charged and to generate tensions among the diverse actors in the humanitarian response.

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At the same time, elements in complex emergencies tend to support more coordinated or cooperative work. In the current crises in Mali, Somalia and Syria organisations may prioritise neutrality and impartiality by actively avoiding association with other actors. At the same time, however, lack of access to affected communities, together with insecurity, has pushed many international organisations to work through remote management mechanisms – that is, to collaborate to a high degree with local organisations. These collaborations are difficult: in particular, there are real issues around risk transfer and limitations to the scope of the response.

Beyond the basic distinction between natural disasters and armed conflict settings, research and evaluations highlight some further characteristics that influence decisions to work together. For instance, countries that experience recurrent, cyclical crises, such as droughts and floods, will tend to host a fairly stable and consistent group of humanitarian actors who will often know each other fairly well and work together between emergencies on issues of preparedness and learning. These types of crisis and response appear to enable a more transformative perspective on collaborative approaches, including capacity development, and on the shift from internationally to nationally and locally led responses.

Phase in the programme cycle management

Some phases in the humanitarian project cycle have traditionally included more coordinated approaches than others. In these phases coordination and collaboration appear to be easier at some levels.

Examples of collaborative and coordinated approaches in the **assessment phase** of the programme cycle include increased efforts towards joint assessments led by the UN and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Assessment Task Force. These have crystallised in a common methodology known as the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment, which has been implemented in several humanitarian crises and continues to be in use, for instance in Pakistan (in the September 2014 floods in Punjab) and the armed confrontations and displacement in the Central African Republic (CAR) (in January 2014). Another example of a coordinated country-focused approach to assessments and subsequent humanitarian responses can be found in the assessments that are incorporated in the DRC Rapid Response Mechanism. This was created some 10 years ago to respond to the multiple displacement needs associated with the dynamics of the conflict in the DRC and is now being exported to other countries such as the CAR.

The Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB) highlighted the importance of adopting coordinated approaches to the assessment of humanitarian crisis needs. It particularly acknowledged the relevance of such approaches after the joint evaluation of the 2010 Sumatra earthquake. This evaluation recommended another area for coordinated work: strengthened joint contingency planning for future disasters (Baker, 2014).

Coordinated approaches are adopted less often in the **design and formulation phase** of the programme cycle. However, the methodological approaches to project design offered by the theory of change and logical framework approaches have not only been widely adopted in the sector, but have also been enforced by key players such as international donors. Coordinated approaches to programme design also occur – albeit at a fairly high level – through the clusters and HCTs, which formerly produced a Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) and now produce a Strategic Response Plan. Both of these outline the humanitarian activities that actors working within or associated with IASC coordination mechanisms need to undertake.

The **evaluation phase**, despite generating some specific good practices, remains a phase where coordinated and joint efforts are still confronted with reluctance. An example of the push for such collaborative initiatives in this area was the piloting and consolidation of Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation (IA-RTE) practice by the IASC starting in 2007 (IASC, 2011).

More recently, in the context of the IASC Transformative Agenda process, IA-RTEs have been phased out and replaced by a different type of inter-agency evaluation exercises (IASC-Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations) that focus on understanding collective action and results at country level in L3 emergencies (IASC, 2014). Although not evaluative in nature, the IASC Transformative Agenda has also introduced another type of inter-agency exercise at field level – the so-called Operational Peer Reviews – which aims at facilitating rapid feedback on ongoing operational issues among senior humanitarian leaders during L3 emergency responses (Moumtzis, 2014).

Certain **functions and areas** are more prone to collaborative approaches, if not across all constituencies of the international humanitarian system, then at least among actors of one constituency, such as NGOs. These include, for example, **technical and sectoral aspects** such as working with refugees in camp settings, health and nutritional protocols, and essential medicine lists, and issues around advocacy for access, the rights of affected populations, and common services and logistics. Advocacy is another sector that brings humanitarian actors together to strengthen their voice and messages. Coalitions of stakeholders advocate together on issues ranging from increased access to adapting international legislation to national law. As seen above on the spectrum of coordination, specific, short-term and activity-focused coordination approaches are often undertaken in humanitarian crises. Some of these efforts have given birth to more sustained initiatives incorporating elements of learning and evaluation. These include cash- and market-based responses such as the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP),[8] an initiative originating in the desire to gather lessons learned from the emergency response to the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
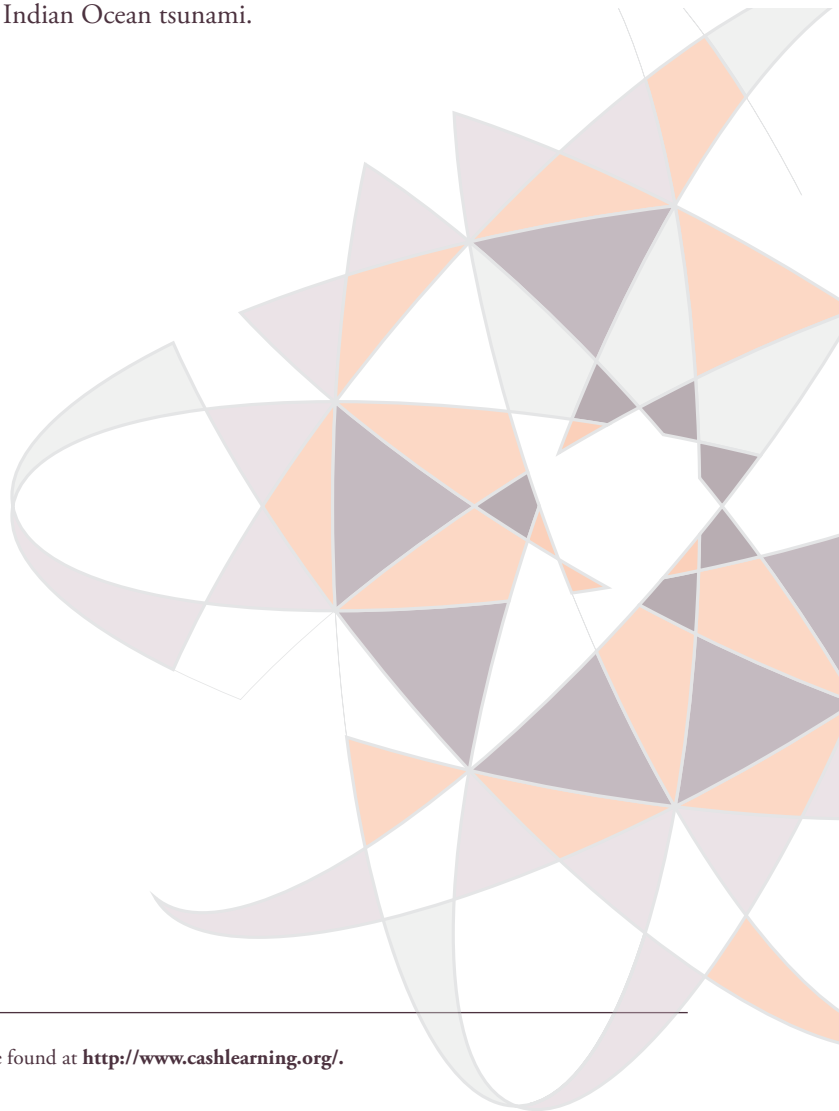
8   Details of CALP can be found at **http://www.cashlearning.org/.**

Power balances: different forms of power relationship

Another important factor that will influence the degree of coordination in most contexts is the attitude of more powerful actors towards coordinated activity. It is important to acknowledge significant differences that depend on whether coordination is implemented by command, derived from a position of power and authority, or put in place by consensus derived from instrumental arguments around the benefits to be gained from coordinated action. There are different forms and modalities of collaboration based on where power lies. These modalities range from voluntary consortiums and communities of practice (CoPs) around sectoral and thematic issues through formalised (but theoretically voluntary) structures such as the clusters, to compulsory arrangements whereby participation in government coordination structures or UN-integrated missions conditions access to resources and affected areas.

4. The current situation: structures for working together

4.1 Coordination by governments

A large body of law, international declarations, documents and frameworks make it clear that the state holds overall responsibility and must take the primary role in terms of leading and coordinating humanitarian assistance in its territory. UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/46/182 of 1991, on Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations, recognises the central role of states in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. It establishes a set of guiding principles, including that

> the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations …. Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory.[9]

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9   See the complete text at http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r182.htm.

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Evaluations suggest, however, that in some cases the desire of governments to coordinate relief activities outstrips their capacity to do so effectively: coordinating multiple actors can be extremely resource-intensive; often these resources do not exist or are needed elsewhere.

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In practice, government capacity to effectively coordinate humanitarian assistance differs significantly from one state to another. Van Brabant (1999: 5) states that 'many countries have created specialised ministers or administrations to deal with refugees (e.g. Pakistan and Ethiopia) or for relief, rehabilitation and/or reconstruction (e.g. Rwanda, Malawi and Sri Lanka)'. The decade-and-a-half following the adoption of Resolution A/RES/46/182 was marked by continued growth in both the number and capacity of national disaster management authorities. Government agencies have taken the lead in coordinating assistance in a number of recent emergencies. Notable are the Ethiopian and Kenyan responses to the drought of 2010-2011, that of Pakistan to the floods of 2010 and 2011, and that of the Philippines to Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in 2013.

Evaluations suggest, however, that in some cases the desire of governments to coordinate relief activities outstrips their capacity to do so effectively: coordinating multiple actors can be extremely resource-intensive; often these resources do not exist or are needed elsewhere. Lack of capacity is particularly noticeable at a local, operational level (Bouregba, 2011; Neseni and Guzha, 2009; Salomons and Dijkzeul, 2008; Slim, 2012; Steets et al., 2010; 2014).

In addition, international humanitarian organisations can be wary of government coordination where the government is party to a conflict or where they perceive that aid might be used – or not used – to further political ends (a not unlikely circumstance where political actors are taking decisions; see, for example, Neseni and Guzha (2009)). As Maxwell and Parker (2012: 10) note, 'In exceptional occasions, governments cannot or should not lead, but these are exceptions'. Government coordination is most likely to be successful 'in contexts characterised by chronic or recurring disasters, [where there are] governments with relatively strong capacities and comparatively little concern about the humanitarian principles' (Steets et al., 2014: 33).

While international actors have on occasion been uncomfortable with government-led humanitarian coordination – and particularly about how their participation affects the humanitarian principle of independence – governments have also been frustrated by international organisations, which can appear 'over-resourced, unaccountable, and donor-driven' (Harvey, 2010: 11). Where international organisations fail to participate in coordinated activities, humanitarian response can undermine state sovereignty and fail to connect with broader development programming. This can lead to problems in the longer term, hampering recovery activities and potentially decreasing the legitimacy and accountability of the state in the eyes of the crisis-affected population.

Neither governments nor the international system is monolithic. As a result, it can be hard for both parties to identify interlocutors in an emergency, particularly if government ministry structures do not follow the same sectoral divisions as IASC Clusters (Beúnza, 2011; Bouregba, 2011; Maxwell and Parker, 2012). In addition, incident command systems (ICSs) are becoming an increasingly common approach to disaster management among government response agencies, yet very few international agencies are trained in or operate such systems.[10] If international organisations wish to make increased government coordination a reality, they may need to be prepared to invest in ways to better understand government emergency structures and practices and to organise themselves so that they can better integrate with these.[11] They may also need to accept that coordination meetings occur primarily in the language of the country and not in English (or French). Similarly, donors may wish to consider transferring more funds to affected states to support capacity development, as has happened successfully in Mozambique (Harvey, 2010).

4.2 The IASC humanitarian coordination system

The formal coordination mechanism for the international humanitarian system has developed incrementally over the past 20 years, particularly as a result of the IASC's Humanitarian Reform Process and the subsequent Transformative Agenda (which comprises three pillars, one of which is 'improved coordination'). The key elements of the coordination structure at a country level are HCTs, clusters and the Inter-Cluster Coordination Mechanism (ICCM).

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10   Personal communication, Kevin Misenheimer, US Forest Service, December 2014. Countries using ICSs include Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the Philippines.

11   Indeed, Harvey (2010) suggests that, even where they do not work with the state (because the state is implicated in the creation of the humanitarian situation, for example), international actors should model their structures on those of the state so as to be able to align with the state at some future point.

HCTs are chaired by humanitarian coordinators (HCs), who are 'responsible for leading and coordinating humanitarian action of relevant organisations in country' through 'building consensus among relevant organisations involved in humanitarian action and actively facilitating cooperation among them' (IASC Working Group, 2009: 1). However, the 'ownership of coordination rests with all relevant organisations' (IASC Working Group, 2009: 1), which are represented on the HCT by the senior official in-country. This body 'is the centre-piece of … humanitarian coordination architecture established by Humanitarian Reform … Its objective is to ensure that the activities of such organisations are coordinated' (IASC, 2009: 1). The role of the HCT is, broadly, to agree on common strategic and policy issues affecting humanitarian response in-country and to promote adherence to appropriate strategies and principles. Organisations sending representatives include UN agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); international NGOs and the Red Cross/Crescent; as well as, in some cases, local NGOs and donor organisations: the exact composition in any given context should be determined by 'operational relevance' (IASC, 2009: 1). Members 'commit to participate in coordination arrangements' (IASC, 2009: 1), while recognising that this should not impinge on their individual mandate and authority (IASC Working Group, 2009).

Below the HCT are the clusters, which are responsible for coordinating activity in specific technical sectors (food security, WASH, health, etc.) Each cluster has a lead agency (or, in some cases, two) at the global level that is responsible for, among other things, providing a coordinator to facilitate at the country level. In some responses the humanitarian community may also establish clusters at the sub-national (operational) level. Clusters have fairly broad responsibilities,[12] including developing sectoral strategy, identifying priorities, coordinating information collection and exchange, and capacity development, among other areas (IASC, 2012b). Cluster strategy feeds into the overall humanitarian strategy determined by the HCT.

There is generally some form of ICCM linking the clusters to the HCT. This mechanism is determined on a country-by-country basis. In some cases staff specifically tasked with inter-cluster coordination responsibilities undertake relevant roles. In other cases, and increasingly, the OCHA head of office in the country takes on this mantle.

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12   At least in a large-scale (L3) response: the most recent guidance on clusters concentrates on this type of response.

There has been no evaluation of this coordination system in its entirety. However, real-time evaluations have considered the role of HCs and HCTs (Grunewald et al., 2010; Polastro et al., 2011; Slim, 2012), as have after-action reviews by the IASC's Strategic Transformative Agenda Implementation Team. In addition there has been consideration of the general effectiveness of HCs and HCTs (Featherstone, 2010), the role of HCs (Kent, 2009) and the role of NGOs in the humanitarian coordination architecture (McIlreavy and Nichols, 2013). Clusters have received more attention: there have been two evaluations of the cluster system as a whole (Steets et al., 2010; Stoddard et al., 2007); large-scale evaluations of global clusters, including of the Logistics and Food Security Clusters (Majewski et al., 2012; Steets et al., 2014); and a fairly large number of evaluations of clusters at the country level.

A mixed picture emerges from these evaluations and studies. In general the research is often negative about the role of HCTs:

> While in theory HCTs have the potential to provide collective humanitarian leadership, in practice they have struggled to achieve this and often fail to live up to the mandate outlined by the IASC … ambitions to use the HCT as a strategic forum remain unmet, and … in many emergencies the HCTs are best characterised by the absence of strategic leadership and intent. (Featherstone, 2012: 9)

Failures of HC/HCT leadership were noted in Haiti; in the Horn of Africa crisis of 2011, where UN agencies had a 'lack a common vision of the humanitarian response and a "joint voice"' (Slim, 2012: 56); and in the response to the Pakistani floods of the same year, where the HCT resembled '11 captains of the same team on a football pitch' (Polastro et al., 2011: 48). However, the latter evaluation also suggested that HCTs were improving and in some situations seem to have proved an effective forum for response coordination; e.g. see ALNAP (2012), which discusses effective leadership and coordination in South Sudan.

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Many of the challenges in the international coordination system spring from the fact that, while organisations might wish to commit to coordination in principle, they have differing organisational mandates and priorities and are often in competition for funds, which makes coordination extremely difficult in practice.

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While the 2011 Humanitarian Emergency Response Review judged the performance of clusters to be 'disappointing' (Ashdown and Mountain, 2011), most evaluations have tended to be more positive. A recent review of cluster evaluations by ALNAP found that the majority of the clusters that were evaluated[13] were seen to have improved information sharing and – critically – decreased operational duplication and gaps in coverage. In situations where clusters were not present there was less coordination (Majewski et al., 2012; Vega, 2011). In several cases humanitarian organisations had created cluster-like structures (Maxwell and Parker, 2012; Steets et al., 2014), suggesting that clusters are fulfilling a felt need.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the formal international coordination system has faced a formidable set of challenges. Many of these challenges spring from the fact that, while organisations might wish to commit to coordination in principle, they have differing organisational mandates and priorities and are often in competition for funds, which makes coordination extremely difficult in practice. Because each organisation is an independent entity with its own accountabilities, coordination cannot be imposed (except in cases where the government makes it a condition for operating in the state). There is no single line of authority: HCs cannot command; they can only 'cajole and persuade' (Kent, 2009: 23).

There has also been a lack of clarity over what coordination actually means in this system. The various terms of reference suggest that, in terms of the typology presented in section 3.1, above, clusters and HCTs are meant to be forums for information sharing, cooperation and collaboration. However, collaboration has proved extremely difficult to achieve in most cases: it might be more realistic to concentrate expectations around a lower level of coordination (see Knox Clarke and Campbell, forthcoming).

There has also often been a lack of clarity in the coordination system over how information and decisions should move from operational-level cluster to country cluster to ICCM and HCT. In general, links between the different elements appear less effective than links between organisations in a single element.

In addition, the formal coordination system has been regularly criticised for its lack of flexibility: critics suggest that it has tended to be instituted as a single, monolithic system, irrespective of the specific coordination requirements in any given context. A key element of this criticism is that the system has not been designed to link effectively with existing, government-led coordination platforms. It has thus tended to duplicate, or even side line, government efforts.

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13   Of 25 evaluations and case studies reviewed, 16 were broadly positive, 5 broadly negative and 4 unclear.

Finally, the coordination system (particularly at the cluster level) has generally done a poor job of including national actors – NGOs and CSOs. There is a tension here, however, between keeping the cluster at a manageable size – because very large HCTs and clusters find it almost impossible to take decisions (e.g. see Grunewald et al., 2010; Moumtzis, 2014) – and allowing maximum representation (see box 1).

What is noticeable, however, is that at the country level individual clusters and HCTs have identified these problems and have worked to address them. Clusters in several locations have established strategic advisory groups (SAGs) to facilitate decision-making in situations where the cluster is too large to hold substantive strategic discussions. On occasion they have also found ways to work effectively as part of the government coordination system in situations where this is warranted (e.g. see Beúnza, 2011). Many of these innovations have been recognised at the global level and incorporated into global guidance: the most recent reference note for clusters clarifies that flexibility and context are important considerations in establishing any cluster; that clusters should be operational only for as long as they are needed; and that in all cases 'the ideal approach is to support national mechanisms for sectoral coordination' (IASC, 2012b: 4). Recognising the need to 'balance the need for consultation on operational concepts with the need to … ensure key decisions are taken by a manageable number of partners' (IASC, 2012b: 11), the guidance also outlines how clusters can create SAGs. At the HCT level recent guidance has attempted to clarify the role of HCs with respect to HCTs (IASC, 2012a).

While the existing coordination system is far from perfect, there are reasons to believe that at the moment it might be better than no coordination system, and that those involved in developing elements of the system have demonstrated an ability and willingness to learn and improve.

4.3 NGO relations: consortiums and country networks

The diversity of NGOs at the international and national levels is daunting. The SOHS mapping (ALNAP, 2012) includes some 4,400 NGOs,[14] of which 18% are international and 64% national.[15] It is, perhaps, unsurprising that in many countries where there are significant humanitarian response operations, NGOs have established networks and consortiums to allow for better coordination among themselves and to address shared problems.

Scriven (2013) considers the structure, functions and success criteria for NGO networks in four Asian countries. These networks – which varied in size from five to several hundred members – are active in a range of areas: developing relationships of trust among similar actors (community building), bringing diverse actors together (convening), knowledge management and information exchange, advocacy, resource mobilisation and – in some cases – the implementation of humanitarian programming.

In terms of the spectrum of coordination outlined above, these networks are generally similar to clusters: their most often-reported function relates to communication through both formal channels (meetings, websites and publications) and informal channels (discussions during coffee breaks and at social activities). Networks are also active in promoting good practice – often through the circulation of training materials and opportunities – and, in some cases, in conducting joint activities. The most common and successful joint activities seem to be in advocacy. However, we also consider examples of collaboration in the form of joint programming (e.g. the Corporate Network for Disaster Response Secretariat in the Philippines manages programmes on behalf of its members), noting that, while these activities could be successful, networks have to be careful to ensure that they do not end up competing with their member organisations. As Klenk and Stewart (n.d.: 16) note, 'a perception that individual agency agendas are somehow in conflict with agreed consortium activities can quickly diminish trust'.

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14   Although it should be noted that of these 4,400, the SOHS suggests that 38% of funding goes to only five international NGOs/federations: MSF, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam, the International Save the Children Alliance and World Vision International (ALNAP, 2012).

15   For the remaining 19% the scope of their operations is unclear.

BOX 1. FACTORS DEFINING SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL NETWORKS

Scriven (2013) suggests the following eight factors that tend to distinguish effective country-level humanitarian networks:

- Successful networks demonstrate clear aims and goals, creating cohesion and mobilising action among network members.

- A network's membership should be of a size and composition that creates cohesion and supports its functions.

- Organisational forms and structures should enable a network to perform its given functions.

- To succeed, national humanitarian networks and their supporters must identify sustainable funding models that protect network independence.

- For networks to function sustainably, they must develop and maintain clear, transparent governance structures, avoiding competition and duplication.

- National humanitarian networks can benefit from fostering external links, both nationally and internationally.

- Networks need strong leadership to succeed, but this must be based on consensus and humility.

- National humanitarian networks can benefit from adhering to and promoting humanitarian principles and standards.

BOX 2. THE PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP (POP)

The PoP were endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007 as a collective effort to contribute to a more effective humanitarian response. As the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA, 2013) notes, partnerships are often created through coordination, and the PoP are a tool to support improved coordination for improved humanitarian response.

The five principles are defined (see below), but not the concept of partnership itself. As Knudsen (2011) notes, this lack of definition 'has resulted in the Principles being applied to any form of joint working, including contractual relationships, agreements without any transfer of resources or even a general intent to cooperate based on similar values (such as a memorandum of understanding)'. They have also been used to inform bilateral 'partnerships' and multi-organisational relationships.

- **Equality** requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of their size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognise each other's constraints and commitments. However, mutual respect must not preclude organisations from engaging in constructive dissent.

- **Transparency** is achieved through dialogue (on an equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust between organisations.

- **Results-oriented,** effective humanitarian action must be based on reality and action-oriented. This requires results-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.

- **Responsibility:** humanitarian organisations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity, and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must ensure that they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.

- **Complementarity:** the diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement one another's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organisations should strive to make complementarity an integral part of emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

The PoP have become a point of reference, although there are practical and operational challenges in their implementation. Some countries, like Myanmar, have adapted them to their own context. The principles are sometimes referred to as the fourth pillar of the UN Reform Agenda (together with leadership, coordination and accountability), as a 'commitment to change the way in which international humanitarian actors work together' (Knudsen, 2011).

Another interesting example of network coordination comes from ECB country consortiums.[16] Here the original aim was to build common approaches to good practice: these consortiums – as the name suggests – existed to build capacity, not to support coordination during a disaster response (Wilson, 2010).

However, over time, the consortium in Indonesia took on an operational coordination role. This move was incremental. In 2009, in response to the West Java earthquake, some consortium members worked bilaterally to ensure parallel coordination around WASH and emergency shelter, ensuring that they avoided duplications and filled gaps. A year later, in response to the earthquake in West Sumatra, the consortium went further. Coordination increased among all members (although it was entirely voluntary, and in some cases members did duplicate one another's work). Members also experimented with collaborative, joint programming for some elements of the programme cycle, notably assessment and logistics. Importantly, the response also relied on joint funding.

This experiment in collaborative programming made it clear to participating agencies that, to work effectively on a single programme, they would need to harmonise their standards and operating procedures, clarify relative roles and responsibilities, and agree in advance on decision-making procedures and mechanisms for allocating funding (Wilson, 2010). As a result, in 2011 the country consortium produced a set of Disaster Response Engagement Protocols (the DREP), a framework for consortium members to use for coordination and collaboration during disaster response (Staples, 2011). Under this framework 'ECB members [were] much better at conducting joint needs assessment and becoming better at joint response coordination', which 'resulted in improved coordination and speed … [with] high impact on the community' (Lassa, 2013: 16-17). However, 'The final learning evaluation in Indonesia showed that in five further disasters between 2012 and 2013 the application and use of the DREP had been low …. Unfortunately the low take-up and application was not explored by the consultant and it was never clear why' (Hockaday, 2014: 3). Hockaday also notes that the Bangladesh country consortium also considered developing protocols for collaborative action, but eventually decided not to do so.

16 Each country consortium was led by an ECB Project agency,and other agencies, including national NGOs, government institutions, peer INGOs and UN agencies" and they continued after the termination of the ECB project (Baker, 2014).

Both Scriven (2013) and the literature around the ECB consortiums suggest that networks are more likely to be successful in more difficult cooperation and collaboration activities if their members know and trust one another. This is probably easier to achieve in situations where members know one another prior to joining the network, where the network or consortium is relatively small, where power among network members is fairly equal and in contexts where there has not been significant competition among agencies in the past. External funding – while generally required for network activities – can be a source of significant competition and cause conflict in a network.

4.4 NGO partnerships

'Partnership' is a much used – and often abused – term in the humanitarian sector, and one often marked by some 'ambiguity … there is no clear articulation of what good partnership means' (Thomson et al., 2013: 3). In this section we consider those partnerships that are formal relationships between two humanitarian organisations, and particularly those between international organisations and national or sub-national NGOs (see box 2).

Among the more prominent 'northern' NGOs are a number that have traditionally conducted humanitarian relief through partnership mechanisms. In 2011, 82% of the humanitarian expenditure of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and 72% of Christian Aid's was passed on to national NGOs (Poole, 2013). These 'partnership-based' organisations have tended to work in long-term relationships with national actors, engaging in capacity development and joint learning.

However, this partnership model has been less common than the 'direct intervention' model, in terms of which the international organisation itself conducts the humanitarian activities. And although many organisations have conducted a mix of direct intervention and partnership activities, such 'partnerships' with local NGOs have often been, essentially, sub-contracting relationships:

> Local partners working in response to the Indonesian earthquake were treated more like subcontractors and little investment was made to improve their response for future disasters. This concern was seconded by members of the ADRRN [Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network] … who argued that when INGOs [international NGOs] talk about 'partnership', they often meant 'subcontracting'. (ALNAP, 2012: 71)

In these situations funding is generally short term and little attention is given to working together to improve the capacities of both parties. The relationship is normally 'reactive, driven by emergency, and shaped by ad hoc interactions that take place at the point of crisis' (Ramalingam et al., 2013: 4).

While there has been support for greater investment in partnership approaches for some time (e.g. see Ashdown and Mountain, 2011), the past 12-18 months appear to have seen increased interest in several quarters in operationalising this approach. This may be partly a response to the situations in Somalia (particularly in 2011) and Syria, where international NGOs have realised that they are highly reliant on local partners to gain access to crisis-affected populations. Two signs of this increased interest are the establishment of a CoP hosted by ALNAP[17] and the initiation of the Start Build Project, which has the objectives of building partnerships and 'Evolving the contribution of international NGOs from the delivery of material assistance to affected populations toward a role that is about brokering, facilitating and supporting local organisations'.[18]

A recent study commissioned by five UK NGOs[19] (Ramalingam et al., 2013) considers the experience of international-national NGO partnerships in four large-scale emergencies with the aim of assessing the degree to which a partnership approach is effective and drawing general lessons. It finds that in the situations considered such partnerships increase the relevance and appropriateness of the response, improve accountability to affected populations, and align humanitarian action better with longer-term perspectives. An ALNAP literature review on situations of 'chronic emergency' comes to similar conclusions (Hedlund and Knox Clarke, 2011).

Ramalingam et al. (2013: 5) conclude that 'strengthening partnership approaches should be seen as key to fulfilling the humanitarian imperative'. They do not, however, suggest that partnerships are a 'silver bullet' that will by themselves revolutionise humanitarian action. When it comes to some areas of humanitarian performance the picture is 'mixed': it is difficult to measure the efficiency and value for money of partnership approaches and, because the majority of local NGOs are fairly small and localised, it is difficult for them to achieve coverage for all people in need across large areas.

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17   https://partnerplatform.org/alnap/partnershipsandcapacity.
18   http://www.start-network.org/how/start-build/#.VJQdopDpABg.
19   ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund.

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What does emerge fairly clearly from the work around international-national partnerships is that in order to be effective, they need to be based on long-term relationships and investment.

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Similarly, a 2014 report by MSF, while recognising that civil society actors are a 'very significant factor' in providing humanitarian assistance in some cases (Healy and Tiller, 2014: 15), also suggests that these organisations often do not have the necessary skills to respond and – particularly in situations of conflict – may find it difficult to remain neutral and impartial.

It would also be legitimate to ask whether national and local CSOs can only fulfil their undoubted potential by working in partnership with international organisations. Crudely put, if there is a case for developing local capacity, why should donors not provide funding directly to national and sub-national humanitarian organisations? What is the added value of the international partner in this relationship? However, it appears that, for the moment at least, this question is unlikely to be posed: Poole (2013) estimates that in 2011 only $16 million of bilateral donor funding went to national NGOs, compared with $728 million channelled to national NGOs through international organisations. Swithern (2014: 64) estimates that between 2009 and 2013 'local and national NGOs combined received … 1.6% of the total [funding] given directly to NGOs'.

What does emerge fairly clearly from the work around international-national partnerships is that in order to be effective, they need to be based on long-term relationships and investment. There needs to be mutual learning and capacity development: international NGOs may need to question their own approaches and priorities.[20] International NGOs – and ultimately donors – may also need to rethink their funding and reporting processes in order to make these processes more accessible. Finally – as with so many other inter-organisational relationships in the sector – partners may have to explicitly address the challenge of working closely with organisations that are potentially competitors: 'partnership-working demands transformative changes in the way things are done – which pose threats to the status quo of the sector, in terms of resource distribution, power and control' (Ramalingam et al., 2013: 6).

20 Interestingly, a key constraint for national NGOs in obtaining funding at the moment is 'the need to comply with the priorities of funders' (Poole, 2013: 14).

4.5 NGO families

NGO responses to the scope and magnitude of the humanitarian caseload and approaches to improving the humanitarian response include other modalities of organisation besides partnership. These include 'NGO families'. These can be defined as groupings of different but related organisations under some form of common structure and modalities of work. There are different typologies of 'NGO families', and a Tufts University study distinguishes five different NGO models: separate and independent organisations and coalitions; NGOs linked by weak umbrella coordination; confederations; federations; and unitary corporate NGO families (Webster and Walker, 2009). Each category is characterised by nuances and specificities, but common tensions include those related to developing common principles; agreement on branding and policies; fundraising roles and limitations; leadership in advocacy at different levels; coordination in the implementation of activities and responses when several members respond to a given crisis; and issues around the development of common systems and structures.

An illustrative example of an NGO family is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is the world's largest humanitarian network,[21] with around 97 million volunteers in 186 countries. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was created in 1863 with a very specific mandate to operate in war and armed conflict situations, including through the promotion and strengthening of international humanitarian law. Other organisations were created to address other areas and activities: the International Federation of the Red Cross focuses on human-made and natural disasters in non-conflict situations, while national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies support the public authorities in their own countries as independent auxiliaries to the government in the humanitarian field. All these organisations work together while maintaining distinct mandates and areas of operations within the movement.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's approach to coordination and collaboration relies on two main modalities. In the Red Cross/Crescent family members can enter into partnership agreements for specific projects. The movement also works in cooperation with external actors such as governments, donors and other aid organisations. In terms of internal coordination, the movement's members have established regular meetings, such as the International Conference (every four years, examining cross-cutting priorities and challenges), the General Assembly

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21   Information on the movement is summarised from http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/ at_a_glance-en.pdf.

(every two years, determining policies) and the Council of Delegates (every two years, adopting resolutions and advocacy actions). A Standing Commission offers strategic guidance to movement members in between these meetings.

Additionally, the movement has a broad division of work among its members, with the ICRC leading on war and armed violence situations, including international relief activities and work related to internally displaced persons. The ICRC calculates that 30% of its workload is carried out in cooperation with national societies. Work on natural disasters and human-made disasters of the non-conflict type is coordinated and directed by the International Federation in close collaboration with national societies. Activities here include development and disaster preparedness programmes, public health emergency responses, and developing the capacity of national societies, as well as local communities and civil society. Finally, the 186 national societies support public authorities in the humanitarian field on the basis of local presence and a community-based approach. Their staff and volunteers are often among the first respondents to a disaster and 'remain active within affected communities long after everyone else has come and gone'.[22] National societies' humanitarian response capacity reflects the internationally recognised trend of an increased workload and greater humanitarian needs at the global level. For instance, it is estimated that between 2004 and 2006 the number of disaster response operations run by national societies rose from 254 to 445.

4.6 Working with non-traditional actors

The military

Although the issue is a relevant one, this paper does not cover the role of military forces in humanitarian and emergency response, either as part of the international and national response to natural disasters or during armed conflict, where armed forces may deliver humanitarian aid to 'win hearts and minds'.

The private sector

Private sector actors[23] used to be seen merely as suppliers of goods and services to aid agencies and governments. 'Now [they are] being viewed as drivers of innovation and strategic partners' (Khiyara, 2013, cited in Zyck and Kent, 2014: 9). Note that the private sector encompasses both small, local retailers and multinational organisations; it is not one entity comprising homogeneous actors.

22   http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/at_a_glance-en.pdf.
23   This section draws heavily on Zyck and Kent (2014).

The involvement of the private sector in humanitarian response is not a new phenomenon: for centuries, traders and shopkeepers have played a role in emergencies. At the local level there are examples of the involvement of the private sector through the cash- and market-based provision of aid, notably through the banking sector and mobile telephone companies. A comparative study of emergency cash coordination mechanisms analysing the cases of Haiti, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa demonstrates mixed attitudes among traditional humanitarian actors towards private sector involvement. While some 'consider that the private sector should actually be kept as an "outsider" to maintain [humanitarian] independence … others … saw no risk' (Kauffman and Collins, 2012: 27). In general, some humanitarian actors seem to become more reluctant to work with the private sector as the size of the 'partner' grows: in most cases, there is more concern over the involvement and role of transnational corporations than over that of local businesses. On the other hand, other humanitarian actors prefer to collaborate most closely with multinational firms with a wide geographical presence.

Private sector engagement in humanitarian response continues to grow, 'but it remains a small portion of overall resources and limited to certain contexts' (ALNAP, 2012: 34). The average share is just under 6% for all recorded responses in 2009-2010.

A key date in terms of the global involvement of the private sector in the international aid architecture is 2000, when the UN Global Compact was established as a critical platform for engagement between humanitarian organisations and the private sector. Another 'turning point' came in 2004 with the Indian Ocean tsunami (Zyck and Kent, 2014: 9): an estimated $565 million was either provided or mobilised by business to provide humanitarian assistance. This reflects a preference in the international private sector to respond to natural disasters, with a bias towards rapid-onset crises – a result, perhaps, of the high degree of public exposure and extensive media coverage this form of crisis receives. The location of disasters is also relevant when analysing the presence and weight of private sector contributions: 'Commercial interest in a particular region also plays a role' (Zyck and Kent, 2014: 13), and corporate giving to disasters in less commercially significant locations, such as Kashmir in 2005, has been comparatively modest (Zyck and Kent, 2014: 13).
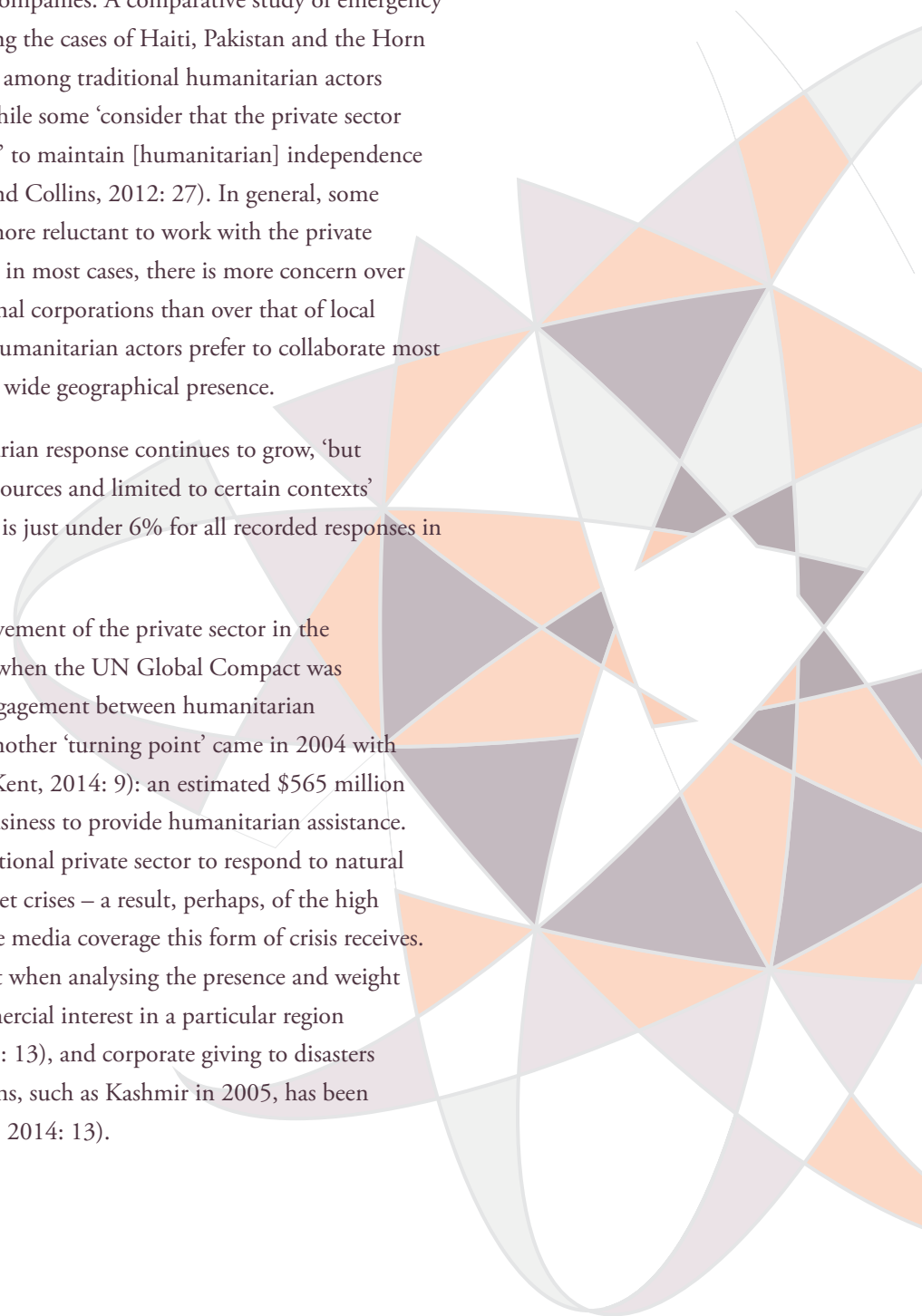
The private sector has engaged least in conflict-related crises. Regional and multinational firms are concerned that such engagement could be viewed as partisan and lead to a loss of customers. Aid agencies are also much more cautious in their partnerships in conflict areas, where perceptions over the independent nature of the provision of humanitarian aid are paramount to gaining access and maintaining a presence on the ground.

Private sector engagement also appears to be more likely in countries where governments mistrust the humanitarian system and are keen to defend their sovereignty, such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. In other words, some governments perceive private sector aid providers as being 'more fundamentally apolitical and disconnected from donor countries' agendas' (Zyck and Kent, 2014: 14). Here, private sector engagement can be detrimental to the access of the UN and NGOs.

In terms of sectors of intervention, the preferred sectors, according to volume of contributions, are focused around telecommunications (e.g. in Indonesia, Telkomset, Indosat and XL provided free communication services (Burke and Fan, 2014 in Zyck and Kent, 2014)), financial services (e.g. Cairo Amman Bank and Jordan Kuwait Bank (Zyck and Armstrong, 2014 in Zyck and Kent, 2014)), logistics (e.g. DHL, TNT, UPS, Aramex, Agility and Maersks regularly deploy experts to specific emergencies (Bridges et al., 2010 in Zyck and Kent, 2014), construction, consumer goods and pharmaceuticals. Private business has largely ignored other sectors, such as education, health services, and key elements of humanitarian action such as coordination and information management.

Some of the tangible benefits for business in engaging in humanitarian efforts are associated with reputation enhancement, visibility (related to the global media coverage of certain crises) and the fact that crises 'offer considerable opportunities for firms to gain new customers, introduce new products to customers, grow relationships with existing customers and enhance brand loyalty' (Zyck and Kent, 2014: 10). Often, business reacts very quickly to these opportunities. The modalities of involvement are often determined by the interests and priorities of private sector staff.

Benefits might also be less tangible: humanitarian work is often perceived as a moral, religious or national obligation, and concern for the well-being of affected people may be particularly acute among national and local enterprises. A further motivating factor – particularly when it comes to business engagement in resilience or disaster risk reduction work – is to ensure business continuity in situations of disaster.

Coordination with private sector actors is no easier than coordination with any other group. The barriers to working together include difficulties in the identification of interlocutors (with both sectors being very diverse and atomised); limited interaction areas and exchange spaces; a disproportionate focus on fundraising and public relations; and the exclusionary vocabularies and specificities of the aid industry and specific organisations, among others.

5. The current situation: other factors that support working together

A variety of elements in the international system can bring organisations closer together and foster cooperation, even where formal structures (such as partnership agreements, networks and consortia) are not in place. This section considers three of these: informal arrangements and relationships; funding and standards, guidelines and procedures.

5.1 Informal arrangements and relationships

As we have seen, emergency and humanitarian responses tend to bring a variety of diverse actors together. In the (often fairly chaotic) atmosphere of a response lie many informal opportunities for people to interact. These conversations can contribute significantly to 'informal' coordination. Often, informal exchanges among humanitarian actors happen at social occasions or on the margins of formal coordination spaces, immediately before and after structured meetings.

Such relationships can lead to the establishment of formalised inter-organisational structures or can remain informal. For instance, representatives of humanitarian agencies often liaise informally to discuss security concerns. Through these discussions individuals create overlapping personal networks of local and international contacts that share information and act as warning systems on security incidents. Interestingly, trends towards the professionalisation of security management seem to be increasingly formalising such tacit knowledge and informal arrangements.

Informal interactions have the advantage of a higher degree of adaptability, which is a positive factor in the very fluid and dynamic context of humanitarian response. They enable exchanges around more sensitive topics such as security issues and the potential development of armed conflict. They can also lay the basis for the trust that underlies more effective formal relationships: between international organisations and governments (Beúnza, 2011), within networks and consortiums (Scriven, 2013; Wilson, 2010), and in clusters (Steets et al., 2014). The importance of informal relationships in support of formal inter-organisational coordination has also been noted in other emergency response contexts (Buck et al., 2006; Moynihan, 2009; T'Hart, 2010). However, informal arrangements are by definition less predictable and more difficult to identify and capture, and can also serve to exclude those outside the 'in group', which is often northern and male (Hedlund, 2010; Knox Clarke and Darcy, 2014).

5.2 Funding

Funding – and the mechanisms used to channel it – can support coordination efforts in humanitarian response. Several donors have explicitly directed funding towards coordinated and multi-actor approaches. The European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) regional strategy for malnutrition during the Sahel drought and food security crisis in 2012 pushed for the integration of WASH, health and food security, and livelihoods projects among implementing partners, enabling agencies to further exchange information and coordinate their approach to the crisis. In this regard the regional WASH Cluster designed a strategy to be applied at the country level, including specific coordination requirements, which included the following: 'WASH actors have to work in close collaboration with actors of other sectors, notably nutrition and food security' and establish a 'minimum package' with common indicators and types of activities per target (WASH Regional Group, 2012). ECHO endorsed these requirements as guidelines for organisations applying for its funds.

Similarly, one of the drivers of closer operational coordination in the ECB country consortium in Indonesia was the desire of the donor to streamline funding allocation (Wilson, 2010). Channelling funding to a group of organisations in this way will tend to ensure closer cooperation, because recipient organisations will generally be required to work from a common plan based on an agreed assessment of the situation. They will also be more likely to collect common monitoring information for reporting and may be more likely to share resources.

Box 3. Financial trends in pooled funds at the country level

The aim of pooled funds is to provide timely and predictable funding to address the most critical needs of vulnerable people affected by a humanitarian crisis or disaster. They also facilitate coordinated funding that is more responsive to a changing crisis. An increased volume (but not proportion) of humanitarian funding is channelled through this type of fund: in 2009 such funds received $824 million (equivalent to 5% of the total international humanitarian response); in 2010 they received $1 billion (equivalent to 4.7%).

Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)	Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs)	Emergency Response Funds (ERFs)
CERF is a general funding channel dedicated to funding responses to new crises/ sudden escalations and forgotten emergencies. In 2013 it received $464 million, which went to 45 countries.	CHFs are country-based channels dedicated to funding projects outlined in UN-coordinated response plans. In 2013 they received $382 million; relative importance varies by country.	ERFs are country-based channels dedicated to fulfilling unforeseen needs outside UN-coordinated response plans through smaller grants. In 2013 they received $178 million; relative importance varies by country.
Only UN agencies and IOM are eligible for this pooled fund, although NGOs implement a significant percentage of CERF-funded projects on a 'pass-through' basis.	UN and NGOs that are part of the CAP are eligible.	NGOs, both national and international, are eligible.
Top recipients in 2013 absolute numbers were: Sudan: $47 million Syria: $40 million Ethiopia: $24 million.	Top recipients of all funding in 2013 were: Sudan: 18% South Sudan and the DRC: 11% each Somalia: 14%.	Top recipients of all funding in 2013 were: Pakistan: 10% Ethiopia: 9% Yemen: 7%.

Source: Swithern (2014).

In many cases donors go beyond joint funding and make membership of a formal network or group a condition for receiving funding (e.g. see Goyder and James, 2002; Grunewald et al., 2010). Here again, donors are using funding to support collaboration, albeit in a more formalised way.

Another set of funding mechanisms that can influence the degree to which organisations work together are the various pooled funds.

Evaluations of the various pooled funds suggest that they have had a generally positive impact on the degree to which organisations work together in terms of improved coordination.

The final report of the five-year evaluation of CERF (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 58) notes that in Afghanistan it 'contributed to reinforcing coordination'. In both Burkina Faso (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 61) and Lesotho, CERF 'brought a multi-agency and multi-partnership approach to both assessment and implementation, improved coordination of humanitarian activities resulting in better and more targeted coverage' (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 76). In Kenya, it 'enhanced coordination at the HCT level … and sectoral coordination and partnership including [with the] government' (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 74); in El Salvador, it 'promoted cooperation between UN agencies, the government and NGOs' (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 70); in Mongolia, it was noted as 'reinforcing coordination and information sharing mechanisms' (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 79); and in the CAR, it 'pushed for more exchanges and coordination between agencies' (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 65). When looking at CERF's impacts on partnerships, the evidence 'is less certain, although [the effect] is higher in CAR compared with the rest of the world' (Cosgrave et al., 2011: 65).

The evaluation of the CHF in Sudan notes that it was 'acting as lubricant for improved coordination' (Goyder, 2011: 4). However, the allocation of funds leads to tensions and competition for resources and 'On a few occasions the HC has gone against the advice of the CHF Advisory Board. These cases undermine the principles of partnership on which the CHF is based and were strongly criticised by many interviewees' (Goyder, 2011: 23).

The global evaluation of ERFs[24] (Thompson et al., 2013: ii-iii) notes that they had 'filled selective gaps and thus has contributed to the attainment of humanitarian outcomes … [and led to a] limited but noticeable contribution to strengthening coordination and leadership'. The evaluation notes that one of the common key strengths of all five funds reviewed was that they 'promoted increased coordination' (Thompson et al., 2013: 11). Specifically, they 'serve as encouragement for the HC to play an active role in interagency coordination' (Thompson et al., 2013: 14; emphasis added), identified as a key best practice, playing an 'active [role in] formal and informal engagement with government agencies to ensure coordination and congruity' (Thompson et al., 2013: 14; emphasis added).
However, 'evidence is mixed, with the results of OCHA internal perception being more positive than indicated by the interview data at the global and country level' (Thompson et al., 2013: 35).

In the Cluster approach evaluation 2 Steets et al. (2010: 39) conclude that 'Interactions between clusters and financing mechanisms to date are mostly strongly positive, but negative examples highlight important risks'. The most often cited of these risks is the potential that funding creates for intra-group conflict: channelling funding through groups that exist to support coordination can 'be counterproductive because [it] can create conflicts between … [group] members, lead to "horse-trading" in proposal selection and create conflicts of interest' (Steets et al., 2010: 14). The tensions created by funding have been noted in NGO networks and consortiums (Goyder and James, 2002; Scriven, 2013; Wilson, 2010) and in clusters (de Silva et al., 2006; Kuitems, 2009). One particularly disruptive consequence of funding allocation through coordination groups can be a strengthening of the impression that a particular type of organisation dominates the group. The fact that CERF funding is available only to UN agencies, for example, may have made some actors feel that the UN 'owns' clusters (which are often involved in applying for and allocating CERF funding).

A further negative impact can occur when coordination groups become preoccupied with funding to the exclusion of other issues. This may mean that organisations that already have funding from other sources and that might be interested in coordination lose interest in participating (Altay and Melissa, 2014; Culbert, 2011; Humphries, 2013).

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24   The first global evaluation of ERF was carried out in March 2013; previous evaluations were made at the country level.

The slow disbursement of common funding can also be a disincentive to coordination and collaboration: the CHF evaluation notes that long delays between submission and fund disbursement effectively exclude organisations that are dependent on external funding to start interventions. These delays can disproportionately affect poorly resourced – particularly national – actors.

Indeed, many aspects of funding appear to make it difficult for national actors to engage as partners or members of networks or groups. Funding is less accessible to national actors, either because of direct exclusion from calls for applications (such as for Country-Based Pooled Funds, which are accessible only by UN agencies and NGOs that have already been validated as part of the CAP) or because of the high process costs of obtaining and reporting against donor requirements.

However, while in a recent study 42% of national NGO respondents cited these 'administrative requirements' as being a significant constraint to accessing funding, 91% identified lack of knowledge of available funding sources as the key constraint (Poole, 2013: 14). Participating in coordination mechanisms can make national NGOs more aware of funding opportunities – but it does not necessarily remove the other constraints to their accessing funding through these channels.

5.3 Standards, guidelines and procedures

Technical and accountability standards and shared procedures in the humanitarian sector provide guidance that can lead to very different actors working in very similar ways. This creates a commonality of action across the projects and programmes of different actors (in the terminology adopted in section 2, it allows the organisations to 'cooperate' and can help achieve some of the benefits of coordination without the need for common organising structures).

These 'common ways of doing things' differ markedly in their degree of specificity. Global standards and guidance or generic guidance on procedures will tend to be less specific, to allow for their use in a variety of contexts. A global standard for shelter, for example, might expect that 'People have sufficient covered living space providing thermal comfort, fresh air and protection from the climate' (Sphere Project, 2011: 258), while shelter guidelines approved by a country network or cluster will be more likely to specify exact materials, size and design.

Similarly, global procedural guidance for assessment or monitoring will be contextualised and made more specific in each case (Knox Clarke and Darcy, 2014). Organisations may be more comfortable 'signing up' to broader, global standards than to more specific and directive local agreements. However, as groups or pairs of organisations move from communication to collaboration, they are more likely to agree to more specific procedures that help regulate particular activities in a particular context (Staples, 2011).

Standards and guidelines also differ in the mechanisms used to support uptake. In some cases uptake is purely voluntary, while in others a degree of peer pressure may be involved. This seems often to be the case with guidance issued by country clusters: it is not binding so is not always followed; see Altay and Melissa (2014) and Kuitems (2009) for examples of cluster guidance being ignored. In other cases there may be an external system for verifying and certifying conformity: donor funding might, in some cases, be made conditional on such certification.

One of the most successful sets of standards of the past decade in terms of supporting commonality of action is the Sphere Project's Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. A broad range of humanitarian actors have accepted and adopted these voluntary standards. In many countries local actors have translated them, and a series of companion standards have adopted their format and approach.

As well as allowing for a broad (albeit fairly loose) level of connection in international action, such standards can serve as a basis and starting point for more organised cooperative action. For example, during the aftermath of both the 2010 Haiti Earthquake and the 2011 Drought crisis in the Horn of Africa, a varied constituency of actors engaged in discussions with government authorities in order to review the technical standards and apply them to the specific context. In Haiti and Ethiopia, WASH Cluster members reached agreement on splitting the emergency and recovery phases using the Sphere minimum standard of water provision per person per day in emergency phases of the response and jointly working towards an increase in the quantities of water provided when transitioning to recovery.

However, while standards can help bring organisations together, they are also subject to the atomising tendencies of the sector. Where common or generic standards can be adapted for use in specific organisations and countries, over time each adaption can take on a life of its own. This has led to a very large number of organisation-specific standards. The recent Joint Standards Initiative aimed to address this challenge through the creation of a Common Humanitarian Standard. At the time of writing this had just been launched in Copenhagen: it will be interesting to see what effect this common standard has on inter-organisational cooperation.

6. The big questions

He who does not ask a question learns nothing. (Swahili proverb)

Responding to the challenges of the growing humanitarian caseload is an undisputed priority. OCHA estimates that three times as many people are in need as there were 10 years ago – 'the total is now more than 100 million people' (UN, 2014: 3) – representing a clear growth in terms of scope and complexity. Increasingly, coordination approaches will be a part of how the humanitarian system addresses this challenge. The ALNAP Meeting in Berlin may wish to consider some of the key questions that will need to be answered in order to improve coordination and joint work. Based on this paper, these include:

- Do we have a common understanding of what 'coordination' (and related terms) means? Do we need one?

- What are the key elements to be considered when deciding whether to coordinate our activities? How do issues around the nature of a crisis, timing, capacities and mandates/principles affect our decisions?

- Is coordination always desirable? In general, what level of coordination should the system be aiming for?

- Are there obvious priority areas for improved coordination? If so, what are they?

- What are the key constraints to effective coordination in humanitarian contexts and what do we know about how they have been/can be overcome?

- How can we work effectively with organisations that do not share our objectives or cohere to humanitarian principles?

- How can we work effectively with 'competitors' to deliver effective humanitarian assistance?

- How can we measure and evaluate the effects of working together?

The floor is open for debate.

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