ALNAP

Better together?

The benefits and challenges of coordination in the field

Luz Saavedra and Paul Knox-Clarke

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

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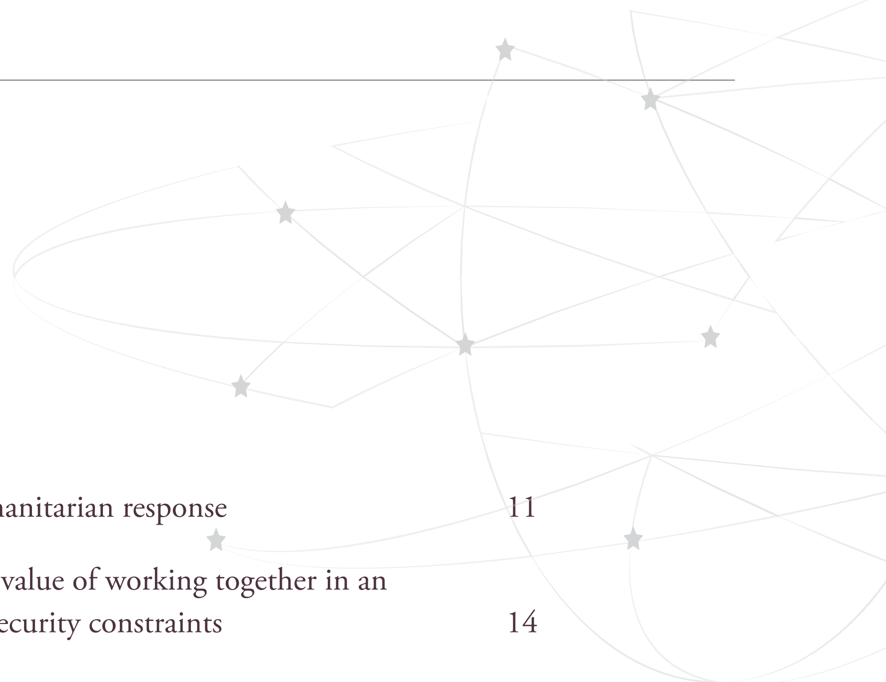

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADRRN	Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
ASAP	Alliance of Sphere Advocates in the Philippines
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CAR	Central African Republic
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
CoP	Community of Practice
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EC	European Commission
ECB	Emergency Capacity-Building Project
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
ESPMG	Ebola Private Sector Mobilisation Group
EWS	Early Warning Systems
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HPN	Humanitarian Practice Network
IA-RTE	Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCM	Inter-Cluster Coordination Mechanism
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International NGO
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PARCEL	Partnership Capacity Enhancement in Logistics
PoP	Principles of Partnership
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group
SOHS	State of the Humanitarian System
SRP	Strategic Response Plan
STAIT	Strategic Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
TEC	Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
UN	United Nations
UNDPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

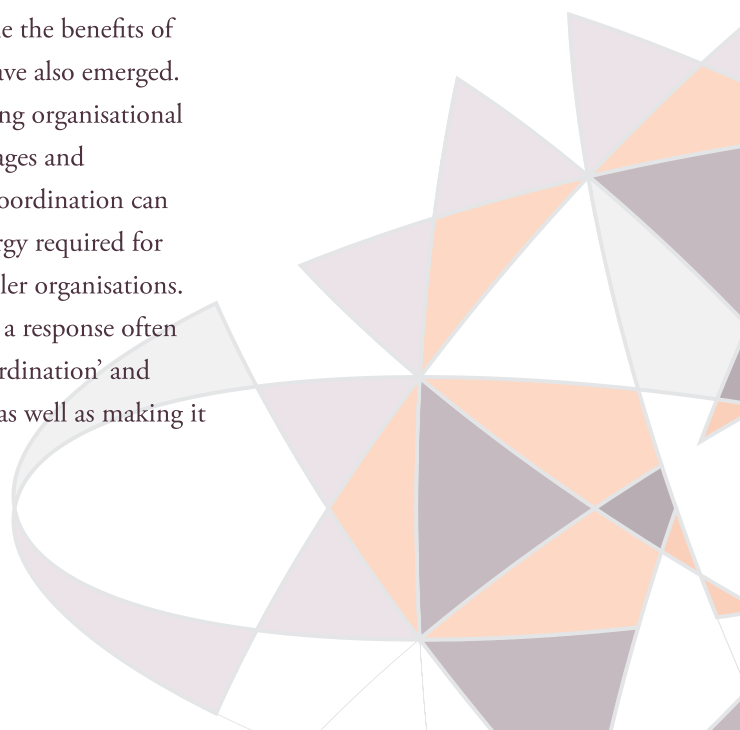
1. Introduction

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 these actors is 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 many emergencies are now much larger and more complex than before. In turn, responses have become 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 improving the way we work together. Many governments have taken a bigger role in coordinating the humanitarian actors operating within their borders. At the same time, as a result of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda (and latterly the Transformative Agenda), the international humanitarian system has developed the Cluster Approach and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs), aimed at enhancing coordination – primarily of international actors – 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. To add to these challenges, the many different actors involved in a response often have different expectations of working together and of what 'coordination' and 'partnership' mean. This can affect the success of joint activities, as well as making it difficult to establish what 'success' actually means.



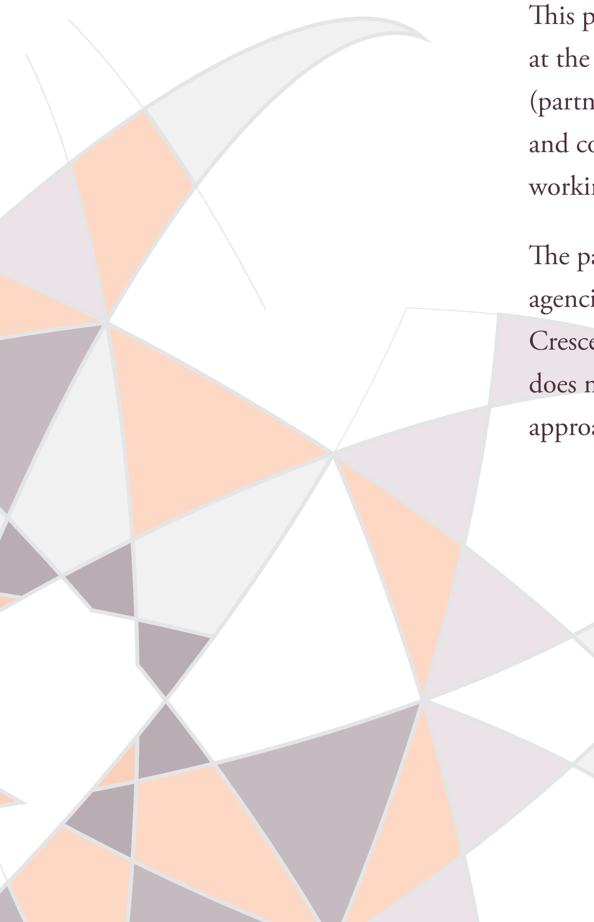
> “With humanitarian needs projected to grow, we can expect coordination and working together to become even more important in the years ahead.”

Working together is not a good in itself, and 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 et al. (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 et al., 2008: 23). From the discussions held in Berlin on 3-4 March 2015, it is clear not all coordination initiatives are the same; the contextual diversity of the countries and areas where joint and collaborative works takes place clearly influence approaches to working together at field level.

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) decided to meet to take stock so as to be able to share experiences and good practices on working together in the field to ensure effective humanitarian responses. This was the central theme of ALNAP's 2015 Annual Meeting and an issue at the centre of the discussions on how to improve the way diverse humanitarian actors can join together to 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; 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.

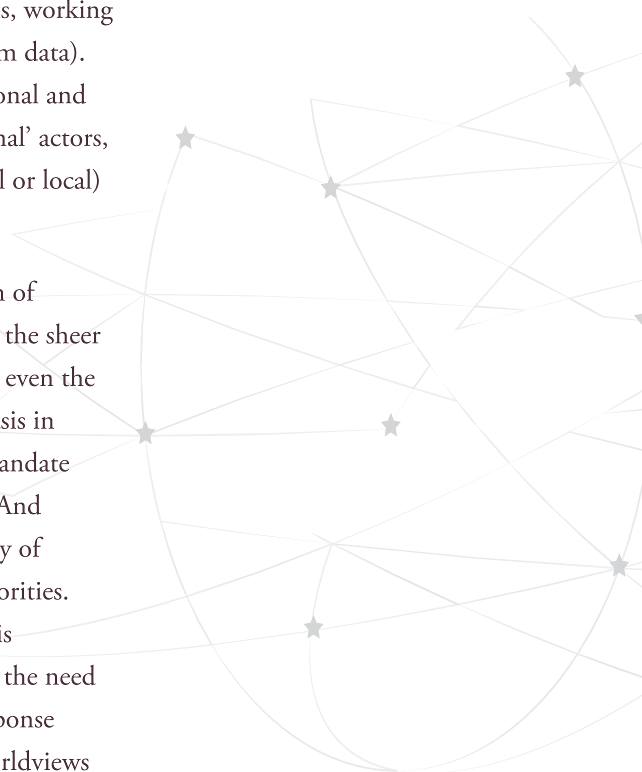


2. Coordination in context: are humanitarians moving closer together or further apart?

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' (ibid.: 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 2015 edition of The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) (ALNAP, 2015), in 2014 roughly 4,480 operational organisations, working in various combinations, responded to 67 crises (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: even the 'traditional' humanitarian actors manifest significant differences of emphasis in terms of how to approach humanitarian aid. These are based largely on mandate and philosophy. 'Identity determines perception', argues DuBois (2015). And perception, in turn, determines action. So in many cases the core speciality of an agency determines how it views a crisis and the areas it identifies as priorities. Paraphrasing the popular expression, it is tempting, if your specialisation is hammers, to treat everything as if it were a nail.[i] Against this background, the need to bring different specialisations together to establish a single effective response would suggest a need for coordination. At the same time, the different worldviews and priorities that emerge from these specialisations make coordination more difficult.

> “When addressing how best to evaluate coordination, Berlin speakers underlined the importance of perceptions on collaboration.”

Establishing what the core issues – those that rise above any organisational or sectoral understanding – are in an emergency is not an easy or neutral exercise. Berlin speakers, when addressing how best to evaluate coordination (see Box 3 on what works in the evaluation of field-level partnerships and coordination) underlined the importance of perceptions in collaboration: ‘We tend to see the flaws in the other, what works in ourselves and we attribute flaws in the others to them, and the flaws in ourselves to external circumstances.’[ii] This was echoed by several speakers and participants referring to the lack of trust: ‘Evidently we don’t trust each other, these different classes and hierarchies of actors, at least it takes a long time usually to trust each other. We know that coordination or collaboration works where people personally know each other and can work together’ Ulrike Von Pilar from *Médecins Sans Frontières*[iii] (MSF) explained (for more details on the role of informal mechanisms see Section 5.1).

When addressing how identity determines perception, one of the most salient differences appears to be between (i) those – broadly ‘Dunantist’[iv] – organisations that focus on immediate responses to the suffering disasters and conflicts cause and that prioritise direct contact with those suffering; and (ii) those 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 et al., 2014).

Attitudes towards coordination mechanisms and initiatives also diverge. For instance, MSF Germany President Ulrike Von Pilar noted in the Berlin opening panel that, ‘The coordination question has to be seen in the context of aid as an instrument of foreign policy and of stabilisation and security policies,’ asking for ‘respect for the distance we humanitarians need from the political agendas’. Many organisations that focus on providing immediate relief, particularly in conflict environments, would echo these sentiments: in these situations, there is limited operational incentive to work with structures (including state structures) that will provide services in the longer term and a strong need to remain strictly independent of political actors and considerations. On the other hand, Carsten Völz, Humanitarian Director of the Oxfam International Secretariat, made the case for linking humanitarian work with developmental activities, given that, ‘Every disaster is a result of failed or lacking development.’ Taking the ‘longer view’ of humanitarian work will generally require working together with a wider variety of actors, including the state, in preparedness and risk reduction.

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 a 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 continues to be politicised, for example in Somalia and Afghanistan, as a result of donors also being combatants (or having political interests in conflicts) and so imposing constraints on the way 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.

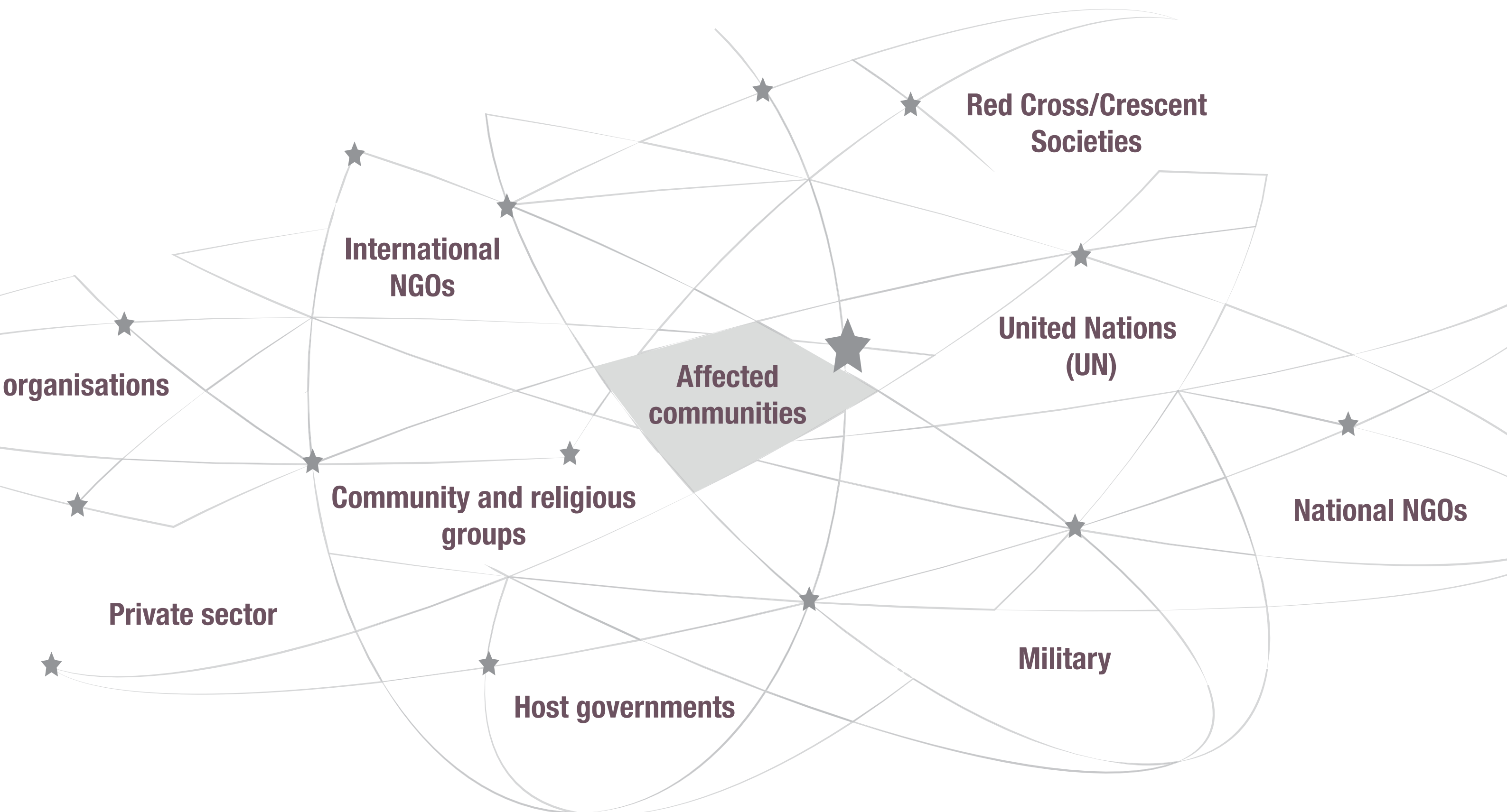
In addition to these tensions among traditional actors, a number of 'newly acknowledged' humanitarian actors – particularly those from middle-income countries – are bringing 'new' approaches and philosophies to humanitarian action.[v] An increased diversity of actors brings a wider variety of opinions, which renders even more necessary the need to understand and categorise concepts around coordination. However, in this increased variety of actors and opinions, differences are exacerbated, making coordination more difficult.

Additionally, 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 need outstrips resources and a large number of humanitarian actors are entering the field, almost all 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 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.

FIGURE 1. THE DIVERSE ACTORS INVOLVED IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE



2.2 Potential benefits of working together

Participants in the Berlin meeting often reinforced the message that cooperation and coordination are not ends in themselves. Several discussions suggested the degree to which organisations work together should depend on the context and the potential benefits that can be achieved, and that less ambitious coordination might be easier to achieve: it might be easier to coordinate joint activities in a particular setting, for example, than global strategies within a sector. As Rieff (2013) explains, 'The questions around coordination in humanitarian response need to be asked not assumed, because coordination is in principle a good thing, it doesn't mean it should get a free pass.'

Nevertheless, the meeting did point to some general benefits to working together and provided examples from country and field practices.

EXAMPLE 1

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC – THE VALUE OF WORKING TOGETHER IN AN ENVIRONMENT WITH SIGNIFICANT LOGISTICAL AND SECURITY CONSTRAINTS

The CAR Education Cluster needed to collect data on the operational status of schools after the coup that overthrew the government in March 2013. Significant information gaps existed and updates were required to facilitate planning, secure funding and ensure implementation of activities adapted to the evolving needs and context.

Given great logistical challenges in terms of access, security and displacement associated with violence, a series of collaborative and coordinated approaches were put in place. The idea was to overcome some of the many constraints to needs assessments throughout the country, by playing on the comparative advantages of different actors ready to step in. As the Education Cluster has one of the widest networks of partners in country, with around 40 partners at different administrative levels, and as these actors, particularly the local ones, are in a good position given their knowledge of the context and interest in advancing the work, several agreed to help.

Three surveys were planned and conducted in August 2013, February 2014 and March 2015, according to information needs and analysis gaps detected as well as monitoring requirements.

Direct positive aspects of the collaboration include the following:

- **Coverage of almost the whole country (data collection and analysis) was speedy**, by combining on-site and distance assessments and engaging with national NGOs, which are more flexible regarding remote areas. Despite tight deadlines, the collaborative approach made it possible to collect relevant, reliable, comprehensive and useful information on the sector from different actors and sources. A total of 47 reports were produced by 11 member organisations of the Cluster and the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) in CAR,[vi] assessing a total of 657 schools in 15 of the country's prefectures outside the capital, Bangui.
- **Relevant knowledge gaps were covered** by dividing up data collection geographically, enabling the production of improved information reflecting the evolving nature of needs and the context. Additionally, the data collection exercise enabled a mapping of security incidents related to schools and other infrastructure, which reflects the trends in confrontation and violence the different areas were subjected to.
- **Connectedness through the exercise, partners reinforced their capacities and know-how to undertake data collection and analysis.** This led to increased information and analysis at Cluster level and the potential to better triangulate the results of the last survey in 2015.
- The Global Partnership Education was taking joint proposals, ensuring the timeliness of implementation of activities in a sector, education in emergencies, with notable unmet funding requirements.

A key feature of this case was related to group learning and adaptability. The assessment methodology and modalities of engagement evolved: to overcome initial difficulties, partners got together to analyse what went wrong in past challenges and to adapt in response. All partners were involved in the design of the terms of reference and coordinated better to understand where there was access and to put in place alternatives to overcome constraints. At a later stage the Ministry of Education verified the data. Finally, joint teams (including international and national NGOs, UN agencies and staff from the Ministry of Education) carried out direct data collection where access and security permitted.

For further details see **http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/operations/central-african-republic/document/secondary-data-review-first-semester-2014-2015-school.**

The following section looks at some of the benefits most often cited at the meeting and in research and evaluations. We organise these according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria for the evaluation of humanitarian performance.[vii]

BOX 1: OECD-DAC CRITERIA REFERRED TO THE MOST DURING BERLIN PRESENTATIONS AND DEBATES, DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES FROM THE LITERATURE AND THE BERLIN DISCUSSIONS

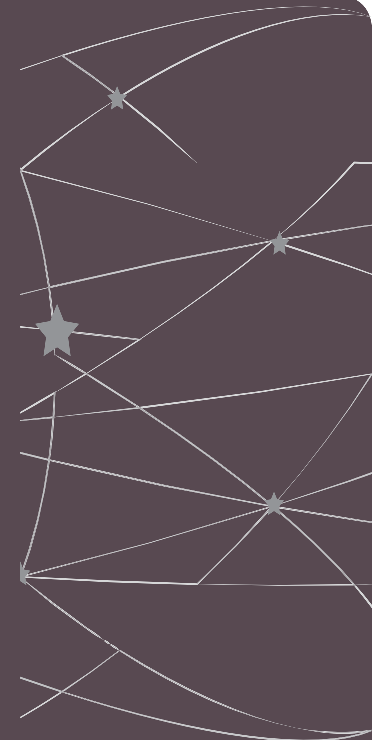
Coverage *refers to the need to reach all people in need, wherever they are. In a context of increased humanitarian need, coverage is a key criterion for measuring humanitarian response performance*

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 Clusters, as coordination bodies, 'play an important role in reducing duplications, which improves efficiency and allows greater coverage with the same resources' (Steets et al., 2010: 55; emphasis added)'.

During the Berlin meeting, several participants and presenters referred to increased coverage as a benefit from coordination, for example in Myanmar during the Nargis cyclone (2008), in Lebanon through coordinated cash programmes, in CAR in education (see Example 1) and with the RRM (see Section 5.2). In the current regional Syria crisis, coordination between international actors (who have resources) and local NGOs and civil society groups (that can more easily access affected people) has been critical in ensuring the (admittedly very limited) levels of coverage that have occurred inside Syria. Another example of increased coverage through partnership was the provision of large-scale cash-based programming projects in Somalia (Truelove and Ducalf, 2012).[viii]

Effectiveness *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 – that is, having information that indicates that, in a given context, a certain set of activities is likely to lead to specific desirable outcomes. Shared learning through the identification, documentation and dissemination of lessons learnt[ix] helps inform future responses.



The fact of working together creates higher levels of communication and so makes more information available, allowing for more informed decisions. Department for International Development (DFID)-funded humanitarian programmes in the Sahel in 2013-2014, by addressing diagnosis, decision-making and resource allocation effectiveness in a coordinated manner, made significant progress. 'National and regional Early Warning Systems [EWS] [...] 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. Here it would appear that a donor push for joint work has enabled national and regional EWS and other collaborative mechanisms that contribute to effectiveness' (Grünewald et al., 2014: 17).

During the Berlin meeting, speakers in 'Your Story in 5' discussed the benefits of coordination through increased effectiveness. Perhaps one of the most salient examples was the multi-agency Vanuatu Humanitarian Team (VHT),[x] which the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recognised as a model for coordination at the Pacific Humanitarian Team Annual Meeting in 2012. It has contributed to improvements in the timeliness and coordination of disaster responses in Vanuatu since its inception. Speed of assessment and aid delivery improved from an average of two months in 2011 to seven days 2012-2013. This was evidenced in improved response times for Tropical Cyclone Jasmine in 2012 and the Paama landslide in 2013. By mid-May 2015, several exercises will assess the contribution of the team and other collaborative approaches to the response to Cyclone Pam.[xi]

***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.*

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. 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 an income for the businesses involved (Drummond and Crawford, 2014, in Zyck and Kent, 2014).

In Berlin, participants focused on the importance of harmonising and coordinating cash programmes between varied actors to ensure they are relevant and appropriate. This was specifically addressed with respect to responses in Jordan and Lebanon,[xii] where banks, mobile companies and a myriad of NGOs and UN agencies are all involved in various cash initiatives while needs are multi-sectoral and evolving rapidly. In Lebanon, a cash working group was set up to harmonise programmes rather than limiting itself to the usual objective of increasing coverage. This approach brought advantages in terms of relevance and appropriateness. By setting up task forces on targeting, cash values, market assessment and monitoring, all actors could ensure their programmes were based on the same information.

***Efficiency** is defined as the measure of how inputs (usually financial, human, technical and material resources) convert into outputs.*

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') 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).

***Connectedness** 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.*[xiii]

Working with government, civil society and development actors can help ensure a smooth transition between the various phases of the disaster cycle and that activities with long-term implications – such as resettlement and the establishment/renovation of health and education facilities – fit with longer-term planning. The representative of the Sierra Leone Red Cross detailed the subsidiary role of the Red Cross during the Ebola epidemic – supporting and working within the coordination structures put in place by the government, such as the National Ebola Response Committee. Working with government in this way ensured 'the government capacities are strengthened so that when the emergency has ended there is something left behind'.[xiv]

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.

Coordination and coherence are, of course, closely entwined. At the Berlin meeting, participants looked particularly at the relationship between coordinated advocacy and the achievement of coherent messages, in line with good humanitarian practice. The International Humanitarian Law Association session on joint advocacy brought examples from Nepal, Pakistan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) illustrating the benefits of a coordinated advocacy approach. In Nepal, the Risk Reduction Consortium facilitated dialogue among actors at different levels, improving the application of community preparedness plans and their linkage with local administration and development/longer-term plans. In Pakistan, the Peoples Accountability Commission of Floods, a joint advocacy body comprising hundreds of local activists and organisations, was successful in ensuring the voices of affected communities were heard at all levels, influencing resource allocation and policy and contributing to the settlement of disputes among administrative levels of the state. In OPT, bringing together actors (Palestinian, Israeli and international) across the legal, community and humanitarian dimensions of needs contributed to enhancing protection for particularly vulnerable communities.

2.3 Potential challenges of working together and critiques of greater coordination

> "Common obstacles to coordination are the differences in organisational mandates; tension in between the time and speed required for coordination and the one required in acute emergencies; institutional resistance to creating yet another 'layer of bureaucracy', amongst others."

The potential benefits outlined above mean 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 are also a variety of coherent arguments against the idea of 'too much coordination'.

Potential challenges, difficulties and practical constraints

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.

A more recent challenge to coordination – or at least, to current approaches to humanitarian coordination – is a perceived inadequacy of the 'sectoral' design of coordination mechanisms in many contexts (and, more broadly, problems with using a standardised' design in a wide variety of different contexts). In Berlin, presentations on the Lebanon cash working group gave one example of this challenge.[xv] Because crisis-affected people can use cash support to meet a wide variety of needs, the programming mechanism of cash does not fit well into a coordination system organised according to specific sectors (such as food, shelter and sanitation). However, some Clusters, such as protection and early recovery, are already taking a more cross-sectoral perspective. Even if the Berlin meeting did not detail this work in progress, participants acknowledged potential advances on how to work across a constituency that contains diverse humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors.

In a context of restricted resources and competing priorities, a clear challenge and constraint to field-level coordination is the capacity and willingness to invest resources, particularly time and dedicated staff. 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 (see Section 4.2 on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) humanitarian coordination system for specific country experiences). One NGO emergency manager in Bangui acknowledged that, 'In 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; our intervention strategy actively looked at covering geographical and sectoral gaps, which requires increased resources, time and efforts to coordination and information exchange. It is a difficult choice.'[xvi] During the Berlin discussions, conflicting priorities arose. For example, one panellist said local Syrian partners often raised the issue of security and safety for their own staff working inside Syria as a concern related to information-sharing requested by international partners.[xvii]

The work within networks and coalitions has another additional constraint: networks have to be careful to ensure 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.'

A further 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. An interesting example from Berlin of improved practice is based on the Syrian context:[xviii] a panellist explained that language barrier issues had been addressed in meetings and working groups by OCHA starting to provide simultaneous translation to Arabic, which had increased the engagement of small and medium Syrian partners.

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).

> One of the arguments against the very idea of working closely together is that there are significant power disparities in the humanitarian sector, which prevent meaningful and equal cooperation and collaboration.

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

In addition to the practical challenges outlined above, there are also strong arguments against the very idea of different humanitarian organisations working closely together.

The first is that in the humanitarian sector significant power disparities exist, preventing meaningful and equal cooperation and collaboration. The danger here is that coordination mechanisms and partnerships can become tools for control, forcing the less powerful to compromise on their objectives or principles.

One panellist[xix] noted when analysing partnerships and organisational collaborative approaches 'the golden rule with power relations, if you want to know how well a relationship is working across different levels of power, ask the person at the lower level of power'. As noted in Section 2, on coordination in context, issues around independence are very important for many humanitarian organisations, and this makes them wary of coordination mechanisms. Similar concerns arise when humanitarian organisations work closely 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 related to '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 scale or 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 how organisations in the humanitarian sector work together: collaboration, partnership, interoperability, information-sharing, working as one, coordination, etc.

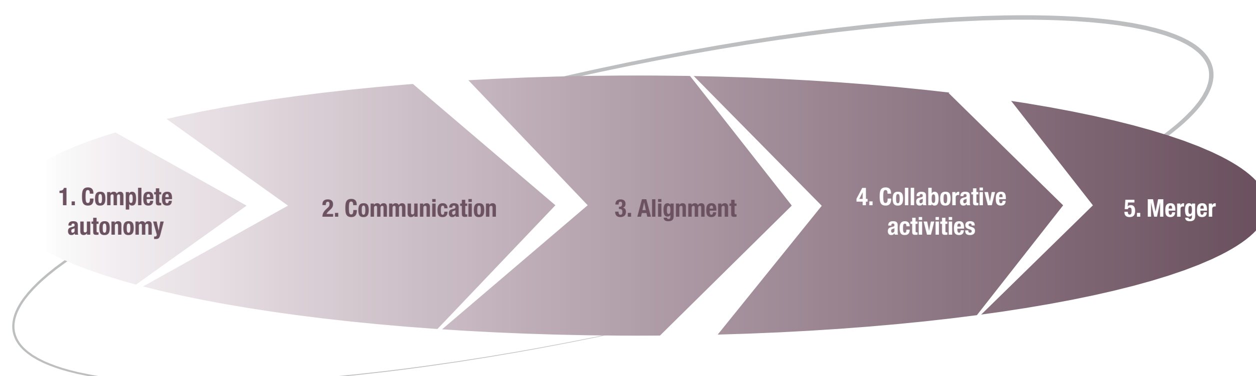
For example, OCHA separates out coordination and interoperability. Coordination is defined in terms of compatible operational systems that can function alongside each other and in some cases achieve synergies or reduce duplication; interoperability is defined as operational systems and approaches that are fully interchangeable through pooled or modular resources and common standards.

During the Berlin discussions, participants highlighted the need to keep clarifying what coordination means. Hence, below we attempt to make some sense of these terms by introducing a typology that outlines the various degrees of working together.[xx] The aim is to help humanitarian actors consider the various ways 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.

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)."

FIGURE 2. SPECTRUM OF COORDINATION



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. In information exchange, 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 it 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.

Alignment can involve a variety of activities, from agreeing to follow common guidelines/standards (see Section 5.3 for details and examples from Berlin on the use of standards in humanitarian coordination) 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.

However, alignment 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. This level of coordination is perhaps best thought of as 'working in parallel': organisations work autonomously on their own projects, but are prepared to alter these projects to better 'fit' those of other actors.

Collaborative activities are formalised, and generally involve organisations aligning strategies and work plans so that, while maintaining their own independence, they carry out joint activities. 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 cooperating. These agreements will tend to be formalised, while collaborating agencies may well share resources among themselves.

Although the focus of this spectrum is on reflecting ways of working together at country and field level, it was noted in Berlin that both this typology and some of the problems associated with different types of coordination 'often resonate with issues that go beyond the country, which are linked to the way organisations as a whole are functioning, they are replicating global tensions'.[xxi]

The spectrum of coordination or any attempt to categorise relationships that are diverse and continuously evolving has limitations. One 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. The categories on the spectrum represent 'ideal types'; the reality is messier.

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, 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).

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It was noted in Berlin that both this typology and some of the problems associated with different types of coordination 'often resonate with issues that go beyond the country, which are linked to the way organisations as a whole are functioning...'

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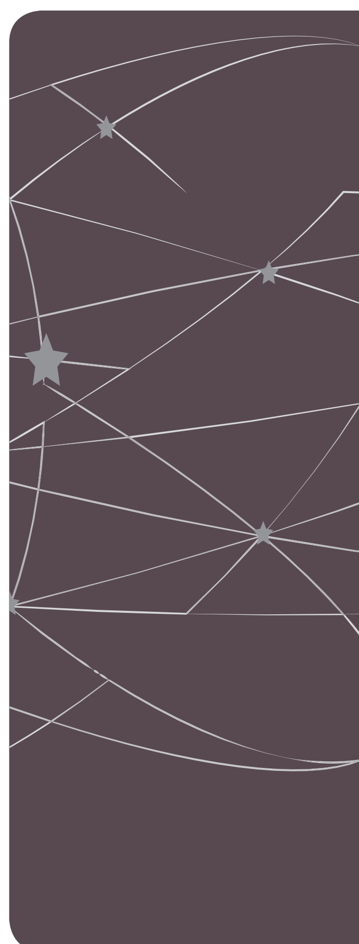


BOX 2: EXAMPLES FROM THE SPECTRUM IN THE BERLIN DISCUSSIONS

- **Communication:** Several participants brought up the role of information exchange platforms and new technologies as a facilitator of information exchange. See, for instance, the South Asia Disasters initiative of the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, with nearly 130 issues detailing contributions from 266 organisations, government agencies and community organisations and defined as 'perhaps the longest and largest effort to capture disaster risk reduction in action in Asia'.[xxxii]

- **Alignment:** Participants alluded to the important distinction between quality cooperative information exchanges around where and what and an excessive focus on information management understood as generation of information (see Section 4.2 for details on how problematic an upwards – donors and headquarters – orientation could be, and the risks associated with extracting information).

- **Collaborative:** In Berlin, it was interesting to note that participants referred repeatedly during table discussions to issues around alignment of strategies, stressing the importance of working according to context and country realities. This was echoed by Panos Moumtzis, Director of the Transformative Agenda Implementation team, during the opening panel[xxiii] (see Section 4.2 on the IASC humanitarian coordination system for details).

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 (in shelter, say, or nutrition). In the typology 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. For example, in the Agora space in Berlin, the Global Food Security Cluster presented worldwide initiatives taken by the Quality Programming Working Group,[xxiv] which ranged from information-sharing to attempts to establish a higher degree of alignment. These ranged from comparative analysis of monitoring tools, such as post-distribution monitoring for common methodological guidance, to learning in context-oriented analysis and technology and innovation, to name a few. Meanwhile, the Global Education Cluster presented common information management tools.[xxv]

BOX 3: WHAT WORKS FOR THE EVALUATION OF FIELD-LEVEL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES?

Evaluation experts and practitioners involved in commissioning, leading and using evaluations on field-level coordination mechanisms, partnership and collaborative approaches exchanged and debated experiences.

Listing the challenges to be addressed, what evaluation approaches seem to work?

During the Berlin discussions, there was consensus that lack of clarity around definition and scope issues is a first and critical challenge in evaluating coordination partnerships and other collaborative approaches.[xxvi] The literature agrees: 'evaluators that seek to examine organizational collaboration as a dependent and/or independent variable will confront the need to operationalize the concept' (Woodland and Hutton, 2012: 369).

The intended nature and scope of collaborative approaches (see Section 3.1 on the spectrum of humanitarian coordination) are often unclear; partnership can be a very political term or a loosely defined one, this significantly determines what is exactly what we are evaluating? Do all the involved parties share an understanding of what the partnership or coordination mechanism entails? It is very difficult to limit the scope when evaluating a partnership, points out Sagmeister, 'because history always creeps in [being] collaboration a learned pattern of communication and interaction'.

On perceptions and learnt patterns, Elias Sagmeister of the Global Public Policy Institute shared a story based most likely on experiments by Stephenson:

> *There is a room full of monkeys, and a banana is on the table somewhere. If one of the monkeys reaches for the banana they all get sprayed with water. Soon, if you repeat this, the peer monkeys will prevent any monkey in the group from reaching the banana, because they fear they will be sprayed. You can repeat this and you can exchange monkeys in the group, and you can stop spraying them, and you can repeat it until it's a completely different group of monkeys, and there's no more link between reaching the banana and having the spraying of water, but they will still prevent any incoming monkey from reaching the banana, which was an example for how some patterns form and are not questioned. They made sense a while ago, and they are exemplified when partners talk about, 'That's the way we do things around here.' 'We've learned we cannot trust our partner with this or that task.'*
>
> *An evaluation is a fantastic opportunity to identify those patterns and to challenge them where they are no longer constructive.*

Sagmeister accompanied these points with the insight that understanding the perceptions of those involved in the coordination process is critical; perceptions can differ greatly. Participants and speakers echoed this. Another panellist alluded to the 'absence of a common narrative'[xxvii] and the importance of people involved, to making them participants of the evaluative process. One interesting initiative taken by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in the Haiyan response in Philippines was to include end-of-mission surveys that all staff could fill in confidentially, helping with understanding different perspectives on coordination. Another panellist stressed that 'the analysis and the understanding of perception [in evaluations of coordination and partnership] will be given a higher importance than in other types of evaluations'.[xxviii] In this sense, independent consultant John Cosgrave reinforced the importance of starting with the question and focusing on one or few rather than multiple questions to gain depth, translated into fewer recommendations and enhanced usability of the end product.

Using the OECD DAC criteria to evaluate coordination and collaboration

The OECD DAC criteria have been used and 'well tested in different environments over many years [...] [and thus allow for] comparability of evaluation findings over time'. Cosgrave perceived them as 'extremely useful for doing method evaluations and for bringing together different evaluations, but you have to remember that the criteria are not fundamental. There are two fundamental evaluation criteria. One is quality, and the other is cost.' The following table exemplifies approaches taken by evaluators:

Criterion	Comments
Relevance	One of the first criteria to look at, as it examines suitability between partners: is it appropriate to work together? Relevance in the context of partnerships can be challenging and perhaps demands specific exercises in a more protective environment, as it can be a sensitive issue. Annie Davenport from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), who regularly carries out joint response reviews, stressed that relevance and appropriateness were the two privileged criteria guiding the analysis of responses.
Effectiveness	What is the goal and how is collaboration working towards achieving it? In Anne Luzot's view, it is 'very difficult to assess the effectiveness of coordination, because it is very difficult to trace, in many cases, what exactly is the change that the coordination was supposed to achieve. We have a tendency to say, okay, let's coordinate, we will be more efficient, but then for what purpose?'

Coherence	This criterion is particularly relevant when examining collaborations with the military. In general terms, complementarity or contradictions between policies are difficult to measure.
Efficiency	Looking at cost of the partnership or other modalities of collaborative approaches, together with the above-noted criteria more related to quality issues, was noted as fundamental. Looking at income and expenditure helps elucidate how the partnership is carried out.

On the other hand, there was agreement that the criteria are useful but perhaps it is important to focus on some depending on the nature and scope of the collaborative approach evaluated, rather than applying them all. As several mentioned and Sagmeister stressed, 'Collaboration can be difficult to measure and effects difficult to attribute': it is challenging to draw boundaries when assessing the effects of collaboration and determining goals and trade-offs.

Additionally, there were mentions of limits in the application of the OEDC DAC criteria. One participant pointed out that they 'don't challenge you enough to look into sustainability – which is paramount for partnerships beyond the primary support to affected populations – [are] OECD DAC criteria […] applicable to evaluating partnerships, as they were not originally designed for that purpose[?]' Cosgrave pointed out their historical evolution[xxix] and several participants echoed the relevance of including sustainability issues in the evaluative lens.

Designing evaluations of coordination to improve utilisation

In terms of use and utilisation issues, the most highlighted topic was around the participatory nature of evaluation (getting perspectives) and the dissemination of findings and results. Anne Luzot underlined that who carried out the evaluation was paramount. For some, in order to reinforce uptake and usability, privileging an external evaluator is not necessarily the best option. Josse Gillijns asked, 'Do you really need an external marriage facilitator or could it be someone from the family?' Anne Luzot stressed that joint evaluations had obtained the best results. She presented the commonalities of four World Food Programme (WFP) collaborative approaches: three evaluations of pooled funds (CERF, CHF and ERF) and the food security Cluster coordination. Who is asking the question? Executive boards of agencies commissioning these evaluative exercises but only one (logistics Cluster) was a joint effort.

In Berlin, participants and speakers stressed the key role of understanding what any particular coordination relationship is intended to achieve – that is, what its intended impact is – and determining from this what type of coordination is required.

3.2 Factors influencing position on the spectrum

For the purposes of the ALNAP 2015 Annual Meeting, it is important to remember not all types of coordination are the same: they involve different levels of investment, promise different degrees of return and require different types of support to be successful. In Berlin, participants and speakers stressed the key role of understanding what any particular coordination relationship is intended to achieve – that is, what its intended impact is – and determining from this what type of coordination is required. What is critical is the acceptance by all actors that, when increasing coordination, there is willingness to invest and to recognise that results are jointly achieved.

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 to generate tensions among the diverse actors in the humanitarian response.

In contexts of armed conflict, there are, for example, 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 and other humanitarian principles. 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 et al., 2008: 21).

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, lack of access to affected communities, plus 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 response scope. 'At the field level, coordination between agencies being managed remotely decline rapidly once the international staff, who are typically responsible for coordination tasks, are removed. National and local personnel are often either unaware of coordination activities or are uncomfortable participating if it is not something they had been involved in prior to the remote management adaptation' (Stoddard et al., 2010: 31). See Section 4.3 on consortia and country networks for specific examples from Syria during the Berlin discussions.

> "The lack of access to affected communities, plus insecurity, has pushed many international organisations to work through remote management mechanisms – that is, to collaborate to a high degree of collaboration with local organisations."

Beyond the basic distinction between natural disasters and armed conflict settings, contextual issues shape which activities and priorities guide collaborative and coordination initiatives. Time constraints can be critical: as a panellist pointed out, 'In an emergency, three months is a long-term vision'.[xxx] Coordination efforts will also be shaped by the existence or absence of pre-existing coordination structures and relationships. In many cases, 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 know each other fairly well and work together (between emergencies) on issues of preparedness and learning. As a result, collaboration in these contexts is often easier to achieve, and may also have a longer-term and more transformative perspective, including a focus on 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.

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 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, such as in the September 2014 floods in Punjab and the armed confrontations and displacement in CAR (Example 1). Another example of a coordinated country-focused approach to assessments and subsequent humanitarian responses can be found in the assessments incorporated in the RRM. This mechanism was created some 10 years

ago to respond to the multiple displacement needs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and is now being exported to other countries such as CAR. When presenting the experience of RRM in CAR during the Berlin discussions, it was highlighted that, as well as being a mechanism for common action in itself, the RRM aims to work with other coordination mechanisms in the country, and particularly with the Clusters (see Section 5.2 for additional details).[xxxi]

The Emergency Capacity-Building Project (ECB) also highlights the importance of adopting coordinated approaches to humanitarian assessment. ECB evaluations recommend another area for coordinated work: strengthened joint contingency planning for future disasters (Baker, 2014).

Coordinated approaches are adopted less often in design and formulation. However, even in the absence of formally coordinated design activities, most agencies use very similar approaches to project design, based on theory of change and logical framework methods: as a result, projects are often more similar, and able to work in parallel, than they would otherwise be. The use of logframes provides an interesting example of coordination through common procedures (discussed more in Section 5.3). More explicitly coordinated approaches to programme design also occur – albeit at a fairly high level – through the Clusters and HCTs, which create a single Strategic Response Plan (SRP): a common statement of the humanitarian activities actors working within or associated with IASC coordination mechanisms need to undertake. However, while this SRP generally appears to demonstrate a very high level of coordination – the collaborative coordination of many agencies working on a single, joint project – the reality is often that the SRP combines diverse, pre-existing projects under one heading (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2015).

“

Coordinated approaches are adopted less often in design and formulation yet most agencies use very similar approaches to project design... In the evaluation phase, coordination approaches are still the exception.

”

In the **evaluation phase**, although the humanitarian sector has engaged in a number of coordinated evaluations of large scale responses (TEC[xxxii]), coordination approaches are still the exception. 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, although the IASC still conducts ex-post interagency 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 aim to facilitate rapid feedback on ongoing operational issues among senior humanitarian leaders during L3 emergency responses (Moumtzis, 2014).

There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages to joint evaluation, and organisations should be careful not to default to either type: 'It's a question of horses for courses', as John Cosgrave remarked. At the meeting, DEC and Oxfam presented some of the advantages and disadvantages of joint evaluation, based on their recent experience in the Philippines.[xxxiii] Box 4 summarises the advantages and constraints the DEC has experienced in appeal reviews and its joint evaluation.

Function and areas

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, the development of **technical and sectoral standards and guidance on issues** such as working with refugees in camp settings, health and nutritional protocols, essential medicine lists and the provision of common services and logistics. Advocacy is another sector that often brings humanitarian actors together to strengthen their

BOX 4: DEC LESSONS FROM JOINT EVALUATIVE EFFORTS[XXXIV]

Lessons from joint evaluation, contribution to change (Philippines, 2014)

Advantages

- Different agencies pulling resources together provided an opportunity to pilot a new approach and enabled a greater focus on measuring impact with an emphasis on results rather than process
- The approach reduces duplication of efforts and resources, taking into account all stakeholders interventions including the actions of disaster-affected population
- The focus on all actors interventions' encourage agencies to reflect on the relative impact and consequences of collective, rather than single-agency, interventions

Constraints

- Challenging initial agreement over terms of references
- Important to ensure the scope of the evaluation is not too large, emphasising information needs, and in hindsight restrict it to perhaps two main themes in order to obtain more insightful analysis
- Time allocation to meetings, reception and commenting on feedback and reaching agreements prior to the evaluation team fieldwork is essential
- Use of external third party to carry on the evaluation meant less ownership and perhaps reduced learning for agencies
- Findings more useful for the sector as a whole

Certain functions and areas are more prone to collaborative approaches. These include, for example, the development of technical and sectoral standards and guidance on issues such as working with refugees in camp settings, health and nutritional protocols and the provision of common services and logistics.

voice and messages. Coalitions of stakeholders advocate together on issues ranging from increased access to adapting international legislation to national law. For examples of joint advocacy actions at country level presented in Berlin, see Section 2.1 on coherence.

Less common is coordinated capacity-building. One positive example of this approach was Partnership Capacity Enhancement in Logistics (PARCEL),[xxxv] established by a consortium of international NGOs[xxxvi] in the Dominican Republic. PARCEL aimed to increase the capacity and independence of local partners to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and was extended to Ethiopia, Jordan and Pakistan through the facilitation of ready-to-go training materials and other tools. In the pilot projects, it was noted that tools based on international standards and generic in nature facilitated local partners to work together in the customisation of their training needs.

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 (where organisations are 'coordinated') or put in place by consensus derived from instrumental arguments around the benefits to be gained from coordinated action (where organisations coordinate). There are different forms and modalities of collaboration based on where power lies: these modalities range from voluntary consortia 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.

During the discussions in Berlin, participants indicated a number of ways of mitigating power dynamics, such as building relationships and trust over time, ensuring transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making and prioritising clear communication. On the other hand, an environment of competition for visibility and resources can hinder coordination at country level. Participants pointed out that power concentrated in UN agencies that are simultaneously coordinators, implementers and donors can lead to potential conflict of interests. As one person said, 'We like coordination but we don't like being coordinated.'

4. The current situation: structures for working together

4.1 Coordination by governments

A large body of law, international declarations, documents and frameworks makes it clear t**he state holds overall responsibility and must take the primary role in terms of leading and coordinating humanitarian assistance in its territory.** Perhaps the best-known of these is UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/46/182 of 1991, on Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the UN.[xxxvii] During the discussions in Berlin, several participants noted that the situation on the ground is often rather different: 'We know the picture is very different in reality: rather than engaging and supporting, there seems to be a prevailing attitude within the humanitarians to undermine rather than support existing capacities at national level. There are lots of context where the attitude is justified, but many others where is not the right way to operate.'[xxviii]

Certainly, the decade and a half following the adoption of Resolution A/RES/46/182 saw a marked growth in both the number and the capacity of national disaster management authorities. In a number of recent emergencies, government agencies have taken the lead in coordinating assistance. 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 (Neseni and Guzha, 2009; Salomons and Dijkzeul, 2008; Slim, 2012; Steets et al., 2010; 2014).

Presentations at the meeting underscored the importance of coordinating with local, as well as national, state institutions. In the **Dominican Republic**, Oxfam Intermón conducted joint work with local authorities that explicitly included capacity reinforcement for sustainability, as well as linkages with accountability towards affected population through the establishment of a dialogue with local authorities. The evaluation of a project presented in the Berlin Agora recommended the 'replication of the successful processes of lobby and advocacy at provincial and local level to national levels'.[xxxix]

In **Nepal**, the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium encourages district authorities to support community plans for risk reduction. In the Kathmandu valley, a Nepali and British Red Cross consortium secures funding for 45% of communities' plans, ensuring continuity of work done at grassroots level.

> One major problem in relations between government and the international system that the meeting highlighted is the tendency of the latter to impose a single approach to response, without taking into account the capacities and structures actually in place.

Governments do not coordinate only with international actors for humanitarian response, but also, increasingly, with neighbouring governments and regional actors. One participant highlighted agreements established between Colombia, Ecuador and Peru as 'the first partners to come to help' if ever a disaster strikes. Regional organisations can also broker the involvement of international actors: another participant noted that the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) dialogue with the government of Myanmar proved a 'more acceptable' way to facilitate engagement with the international community in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis than bilateral contacts between Myanmar and international actors.

One major problem in relations between governments and the international system that the meeting highlighted is the tendency of the latter to impose a single approach to response, without taking into account the capacities and structures actually in place. Coordination would be more effective if international actors recognised, and planned for, a high degree of contextual diversity. The following examples provided by the panellists and participants of the Berlin meeting illustrate diverse attitudes among governments to coordination with international actors:

Middle-income countries are, almost by definition, a little more sceptical and a lot more assertive vis-à-vis the international humanitarian system than low-income countries: 'They are [not only] capable of doing things by themselves, they want to do by themselves.'

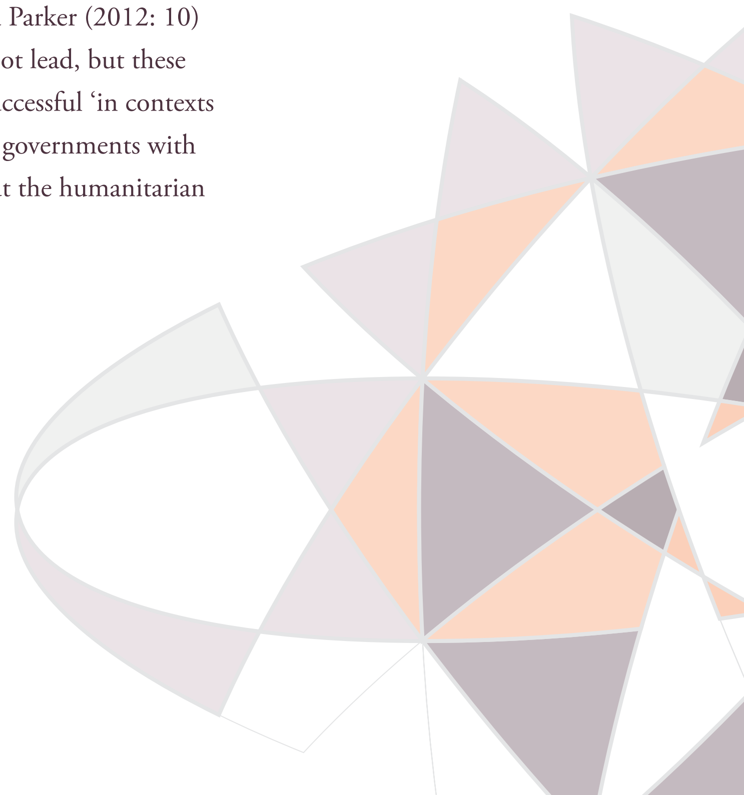
Even within the same region, for instance **South-East Asia**, there are widely varying attitudes towards international assistance. In the **Philippines**, during and after Yolanda, the attitude of the government was one of openness and willingness to share information and undertake joint evaluations. In contrast, in **Myanmar**, during Nargis, internationals had a tough time getting the government to accept engagement with global community.

As well as finding ways to work with governments that have very different attitudes to coordination, internationals should expect to work with very different government structures and procedures from one country to the next. Government ministry structures often do not follow the same sectoral divisions as IASC Clusters (Beúnza, 2011; Maxwell and Parker, 2012). And while an increasing number of states are using versions of incident command systems, very few international agencies are aware of, or able to readily articulate with, such systems.[xl] 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 they can better articulate with these structures.[xli]

> "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 they can better articulate these structures."

A panellist from OCHA appealed in his Berlin presentation to the need for internationals to reinforce rather than replace national systems, and to invest resources according to the needs and capacities of the host government and society.[xlii] Other participants – while acknowledging the UN role of support or the Red Cross role of complementarity with the governmental structures – focused on humanitarian principles and the importance of ensuring need alone drives international humanitarian efforts. These differentiated postures are not necessarily contradictory, but there are examples when reinforcing and supporting governmental structures may well clash with the fulfilment of the humanitarian imperative of impartial, needs-driven, assistance.

International humanitarian organisations can be wary of government coordination where the government is party to a conflict or where they perceive aid might be used – or not – to further political ends (not unlikely where political actors are taking decisions; see, e.g., Neseni and Guzha, 2009). These reluctances appear to be clearer in situations of armed conflict. 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).

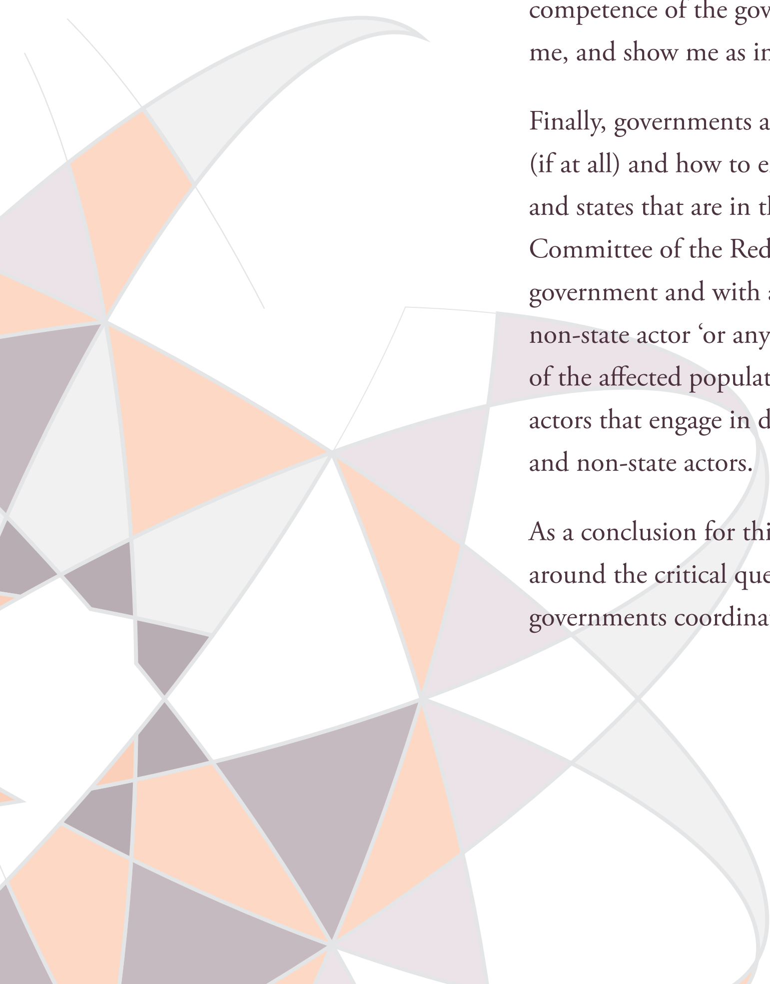


However, as the Berlin discussions showed, political tensions may arise in contexts of natural disasters as well. As one panellist from Pakistan noted, during the response to the 2010 floods in marginalised areas of the country, 'the key issue was neglect from the government, and the main issue we saw was political favouritism. There was a political party in the government and they used this relief as a tool for politics: distributing to those who vote for them, even though their elected to strengthen their future positions.'

While international actors have on occasion been uncomfortable with government-led humanitarian coordination – and particularly how their participation affects their 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, the 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. For example, as a panellist noted, 'Can you denounce a government that refuses to recognise a famine? That's a question MSF asked itself in Niger [in 2005]. Its card was to declare famine when arguably there wasn't one, or at least it was contestable, raising questions over the competence of the government, 'Who are these people who come and humiliate me, and show me as incompetent to my own people?'[xliii]

Finally, governments and humanitarian actors may have differing views on whether (if at all) and how to engage with quasi-governments, insurrectional governments and states that are in the making.[xliv] As a representative from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) highlighted, humanitarians engage with government and with all parties to a conflict situation, be they a government or a non-state actor 'or any other group that is in charge, or they are related to the fate of the affected population'. This echoes the modus operandi of many humanitarian actors that engage in diverse levels of communication and coordination with state and non-state actors.

As a conclusion for this section, three key issues emerged in the Berlin discussions around the critical question of how to coordinate with governments and how governments coordinate responses.



First is the **need to be flexible**, to be able to adapt to the particularities of the context and the multiplicity of humanitarian identities and their differentiated roles. Several participants suggested internationals engage in smart adjustment of mechanisms to the particular context (a panellist from OCHA presented the concept of interoperability as an opportunity, see Section 3.1 for a definition of the term). There were disagreements as to how much agencies should be prepared to adapt. Some participants felt, 'It's more important that the job gets done than who does the job.' Others stressed the need to maintain differentiated identities, to ensure the job is done in a principled way: as an MSF representative put it, 'We are humanitarians, not corporates.' Finally, the Sierra Leone Red Cross representative reminded participants that his organisation was unique, created by a parliamentary decree with an explicit auxiliary role of the government. Humanitarian actors have differentiated roles; would specific approaches such as those of the Red Cross work as well for international NGOs claiming principled – hence independent – action? How far, in the name of coordination, do you want to push for uniformity and what could be the trade-offs?

> Three key issues emerged in the Berlin discussions around governments and coordination: the needs to be flexible, to build trust and to address the issue of power and sovereignty.

Second, the discussions often cited the **need to build trust**. A representative of the Philippines government said, 'Let's put back the "human" in humanitarian.' While recognising the importance of building on confidence and human relationships over time, challenges include the fact that this takes time, interlocutors on both sides (states and humanitarian actors) are often unclear and willingness from actors involved is often questioned. An important element of trust is related to whether all actors effectively fulfil their commitments and responsibilities.

Finally, it is not possible to engage in discussion on the role of the government in emergency and disaster relief without addressing the issue of **power** and **sovereignty**. The problem is more complex than just one of NGOs talking to governments. The politicisation of crises, although not a new phenomenon, remains a valid source of difficulties: 'Delivering humanitarian aid is a fantastic tool for political legitimation'.[xlv] Conversely, there is a long story of interventionism 'without the consent of the "host" country, in the name of humanitarian motives, including the use of force for humanitarian purposes' (Saavedra, 2010: 113).[xlvi]

One panellist brought up an interesting comparison of power and the exercise of sovereignty in humanitarian crisis,[xlvii] pointing to the differences between two massive earthquakes with a high rate of mortality and affected people: Haiti (2010) and Sichuan in China (2008). While the former took place in a state with very weak sovereignty, where international response actors brushed aside governmental authorities, the latter took place in a state with high sovereignty that tightly controlled relief efforts. This example illustrates how not all countries affected by humanitarian crisis are treated with the same barometer by international actors, including other states.

Another area where issues of sovereignty become problematic for humanitarians is where governments are perpetrators of atrocities and themselves are at the root of the humanitarian situation, as in the Syria crisis. In this case, as Bertrand Thaite asserted, if it can be difficult to see the sovereign government as legitimate, it is also difficult to see many international actors – who are influenced by their own interests – as more legitimate: 'How free are you from the sovereignty of your donors? Are you in a position to decide who is legitimate, who isn't legitimate? In what sense can you actually engage with government as autonomous agents, when your donors are actually presenting you as an extension of their diplomacy? You may self-perceive to be autonomous, but what is the perception of the other?'[xlviii]

4.2 The IASC humanitarian coordination system

The Berlin discussions addressed country-level coordination from several perspectives; this section deals with the formal coordination structure for international humanitarian actors established by the IASC. This 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). These are made up mainly of UN agency, donor and NGO representatives.

BOX 5: THE THREE KEY FORMAL IASC COORDINATION MECHANISMS THAT EXIST AT COUNTRY LEVEL

Humanitarian Country Teams

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, 2009: 1). However, the 'ownership of coordination rests with all relevant organisations' (ibid.), 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' (ibid.). 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; and, in some cases, local NGOs and donor organisations: the exact composition in any given context should be determined by 'operational relevance' (ibid.). Members 'commit to participate in coordination arrangements' (ibid.), while recognising that this should not impinge on their individual mandate and authority.

Clusters

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 subnational (operational) level. Clusters have fairly broad responsibilities,[xlix] 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.

Inter-cluster coordination

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.

Literature findings address three key areas as critical challenges to coordination: lack of clarity around its meaning, lack of flexibility of the system and a poor job at integrating national actors.

Although there has been no evaluation of this coordination system in its entirety, there have been several evaluations and studies of its 'parts'.[l] A mixed picture emerges from these evaluations and studies: HCTs have generally been seen to be performing less well than Clusters (Box 6).[li]

Taken together, **the literature suggests the formal international coordination system has faced a formidable set of challenges**. Many of these spring from the fact that, while organisations may wish to commit to coordination in principle, they have differing organisational mandates and priorities and are often in competition for funds. 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).

Literature findings address three key areas: lack of clarity around the meaning of coordination, lack of flexibility of the system and a poor job at integrating national actors. The Berlin discussions validated these three key areas as critical challenges, and added two additional one: challenges around who and what coordination is for – to facilitate operational activities on the ground or to support reporting and accountability at headquarters; and the danger that the coordination system ends up taking away from, rather than supporting, effective action.

When we say 'coordination', what do we mean? The literature suggests 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, Clusters and HCTs are meant to be forums for information-sharing, alignment 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, 2015).

Coordination goes wrong if it is focused solely on generating information for reporting. Several participants noted the tendency of the formal coordination system to focus on the production of information in order to respond to top-down demands. One panellist suggested there was a danger of producing too much of the wrong type of information: 'In the name of accountability, we have created processes that we have repackaged several times, but at the end we have not changed much, the way we are working: to tick boxes on what we have done does not allow us to engage in meaningful discussions over the impact of what we have had with our interventions. Clusters have not done too badly, but still, do we deliver better humanitarian assistance? I believe no. Do we have too much coordination? I don't think so, [but] I think we are extremely focus on generating information [addressed to headquarters and donors].'[lii]

BOX 6: KEY FINDINGS FROM IASC COORDINATION MECHANISM EVALUATIVE EXERCISES

HCTs

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 HCTs were improving and in some situations seem to have proved an effective forum for response coordination; for example, see (2012ALNAP.), which discusses effective leadership and coordination in South Sudan.

Clusters

While the 2011 Humanitarian Emergency Response Review judged the performance of Clusters as 'disappointing' (Ashdown and Mountain, 2011), most evaluations have tended to be more positive. A recent review of Cluster evaluations by ALNAP found the majority of the Clusters evaluated[liii] had 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 Clusters are fulfilling a felt need.

In CAR, for example, the food security Cluster coordinator was overwhelmed with requests for information, at least in part because of the very large number of staff allotted to 'coordination' activities. Panos Moumtzis, of the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT) , found the same situation in the Philippines: '[Clusters] produced more than 200 information products, how many of those were useful to guide decision-makers? How much was really providing analysis, guiding and influencing the inter-Cluster or the HCT in terms of way forward? A lot of it is actually donor-driven'. In South Sudan, a panellist witnessed 'the surge of the Excel spreadsheet': excessive concern over activity reporting and beneficiary numbers, driven by headquarters, to the detriment of collecting information on programme quality or results: 'New York […] requests X to the field, [and say] you have to get back to us by the end of tomorrow and let us know what is going on, and we will take two months to come back to you on what you come back to us with.'[liv]

> In some places, coordination is being used as a substitute for action. In CAR, out of 450 international staff deployed to the country, over 300 were related to coordination structures and most of them in Bangui.

This 'extractive' function of the coordination system has decreased the overall effectiveness of the coordination architecture: '[This} upwards orientation […] means that, despite the fact that we put so many more resources into coordination, we are not really seeing many big changes in results.'[lv]

In some places, coordination is being used as a substitute for action. In some cases, suggested Nan Buzard of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the 'coordination surge has become a very inappropriate and in fact damaging proxy for humanitarian response'.

In CAR, a clearly forgotten – others said neglected – humanitarian crisis, Panos Moumtzis[lvi] recalls that, 'Out of 450 staff [international staff deployed to CAR], over 300 were related to coordination structures and most of them in Bangui.' There were 'too many coordinators and not enough people in the deep field', an EC Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) representative said, in line with critiques versed by MSF in its report 'Where Is Everyone?' (Healy and Tiller, 2014). Repeatedly, participants suggested coordination not be a 'default' end in itself but rather a tool for improved humanitarian assistance. And in order to do this, coordination systems need to be flexible enough to adapt to the realities of each individual emergency.

Unfortunately, **the formal coordination system has been regularly criticised for its lack of flexibility**: critics suggest it has tended to be instituted as a single, monolithic system, irrespective of the specific coordination requirements in any given context.

In the Philippines, STAIT found, 'One of the biggest surprises […] [was] that we had all 11 clusters in the capital and each of the 5 or 6 field locations, do we need all that? Absolutely not […] We need to tailor-make to each situation, make it light we are all there to ensure delivery. There is nothing in the Transformative Agenda or the reforms that says that coordination is a container, that you need to take it and apply all of it.'

The Berlin discussions pointed at two key areas where the system is insufficiently flexible. First, the current architecture is based on specific sectors. This sectoral approach is now being challenged by the increased use of cash programming. One panellist mentioned that, 'We are nowhere close to having thought through what the bigger picture implications of cash are […] it challenges accountability perspectives and may make the sectoral coordination approach pretty obsolete.'[lvii] Another panellist echoed this: as 'cash coordination is very much a wakeup call to rethink the current architecture that we have, which is very sectorally divided […] where do cross-sectoral issues fit within the IASC cluster coordination system? How do we raise some of big issues – like targeting – to the HCT and to more strategic levels of coordination?'[lviii] The challenge presented by cash programming is part of a broader problem: that needs are not, necessarily, experienced sectorally. Yet another panellist underlined that, 'There is not enough effort to go down [to the field].'[lix] As an example of partial understanding of contextual dynamics, there is an absence of clear understanding of what affected people are doing and facing, in favour of sectoral but silo perspectives. Lisa Monaghan echoed these perspectives, linking the lack of contextual understanding – 'Do we understand the country we are working in enough? Do we know the dynamics?'.

The second area where the system shows a lack of flexibility, as outlined in Section 4.1, is in its general perceived failure to adapt to existing government coordination systems on the ground. The formal coordination architecture has tended to duplicate, or even side-line, government efforts.

An additional (and related) challenge to the current coordination architecture is that it has generally done a **poor job of including national actors – NGOs and CSOs**. Manu Gupta, Head of the national NGO SEEDS in India, suggested, 'Coordination is also becoming a club system, of who is in it and who is outside it.'[lx] There is a tension here, however, between keeping the Cluster at a manageable size – because very large HCTs and Clusters apparently find it almost impossible to take decisions (e.g. Grünewald et al., 2010; Moumtzis, 2014)[lxi] – and allowing maximum representation. The exclusion aspects of formal coordination were addressed in several interventions in the conference and other Panel Sessions; see, for instance, Section 4.3 on national networks and coalitions.

“The Berlin discussions pointed at two key areas where the system is insufficiently flexible. First, the current architecture is based on specific sectors. Second, there is a general perceived failure to adapt to existing government coordination systems on the ground. Third, it has generally done a poor job at including national actors – NGOs and CSOs.”

BOX 7: LACK OF RECOGNITION OF THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY – A BARRIER TO WORKING TOGETHER

Christine Knudsen from the Sphere Project pointed out the critical role of a vibrant civil society in some contexts, as it is CSOs' contribution that plays a key role in holding governments to account, beyond the work of international NGOs that can support these efforts; as is the example of Sphere work around the promotion of standards to be introduced in national policies working together with national organisations (see Section 5.3 for more details of the role of standards in coordination). Lisa Monaghan underlined examples from OPT, were CSOs have been service providers for over 40 years yet are often excluded from efforts to build a Palestinian Authority. In South Sudan, too, civil society through an extended networks of churches has been a service provider for years; again, efforts to build the capacity of South Sudanese authorities side-lined these structures.

Panos Moumtzis[lxii] also pointed out limited recognition of the role of civil society and national NGOs within the system, adding that, in STAIT missions to countries in crisis, national NGOs are 'almost the only ones that have always prioritised accountability to affected people as the very top issue for them to work on'. This deficit in recognition is aggravated because, in many contexts with access and security constraints, it is national NGOs and CSOs that are responding, making them vulnerable to the associated higher levels of exposure to violence, risks and threats. See Section 4.3 for examples from the Syria regional crisis response in this sense.

Despite these very real challenges to the formal coordination system, 'There are excellent things happening as well.'[lxiii] While the existing coordination system is far from perfect, those involved in developing elements of it have demonstrated an ability and willingness to learn and improve.

- At country level, individual Clusters and HCTs have identified several problems around excessive focus on information generation, exclusion issues and compartmentalisation, 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. (ALNAP has conducted extensive research on collective and group leadership: **http://www.alnap.org/leadership-coordination**). 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. Beúnza, 2011). In Kenya, there is a government-led system, and Clusters second their coordinators into this, showing flexibility.

- In Turkey's cross-border response to Syria, where the UN does not play a role, NGOs appeal to a form of dedicated teams helping sectoral coordination and requested help by the UN to set up a structure similar to Clusters.
- In Bangladesh, stakeholders used an example of a Cluster, albeit not formally activated, as a platform for preparedness work.
- In CAR, there was an attempt to link the Clusters at country level to an area-based system at local level, addressing a 'ridiculous' concentration at capital level.

Many of these innovations have been recognised at 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' (ibid.: 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).

Should the current system be replaced by something new, or should it be supported to evolve and improve? The general consensus in Berlin appeared to be for improvement, rather than replacement. As Julia Steets pointed out, in Lebanon and Turkey, 'Pretty quickly you saw people calling for something very much like the Cluster to be introduced; to me, that was very strong evidence that no, we don't have a better system, **we should probably make it better but stick to it**.' More generally, participants felt, 'Quality is not a question of more or less but why and how to coordinate, [we need] smart and relevant coordination that is flexible to change and revise [itself] with regard to the changes in the local context' said Steets.

Coordination is a pressing issue. If (effective) coordination saves lives, then a failure to coordinate can threaten them: in one example, 'There was a protection issue for certain communities, where we failed collectively to provide an answer, poorly informed the HCT, and this led to fatalities.'[lxiv]

In many countries where there are significant humanitarian response operations, NGOs have established networks and consortia to allow for better coordination among themselves and to address shared problems.

4.3 NGO relations: consortia and country networks

The diversity of NGOs at the international and national levels is daunting. The SOHS mapping (ALNAP, 2015) includes some 4,480 NGOs,[lxv] of which 17% are international and 82% national. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that, in many countries where there are significant humanitarian response operations, NGOs have established networks and consortia to allow for better coordination among themselves and to address shared problems. The NGO Coordination Resource Centre initiative established by ICVA collates relevant information as well as having a tool box on coordination.

The purpose of the formation of networks may vary but there are common traits and associated challenges. First is the need to look at the longer-term requirements of the country or region in crisis, beyond emergency needs.[lxvi] Several participants pointed out that longstanding networks and coalitions at national level are often well placed to understand the context surrounding humanitarian needs. As a result, they often share a motivation to engage in improved preparedness and reinforcing existing capacities to engage and lead responses to disasters.

Second, networks often emerge around the need to engage on long-term advocacy initiatives that go beyond specific or ad hoc activities. Here, again, participants in the Berlin discussions made the link between local knowledge, advocacy and accountability towards the affected population, with a particular role around continuous monitoring of the context and trends in the delivery of humanitarian assistance (such as in the examples brought by Nyamiye Hermenegilde from Burundi).[lxvii] In some areas, national network members are better positioned to advocate and to monitor the situation owing to restrictions on the work of international actors (such as in India) or access and security barriers (such as with national network members' work in the Syria response).

Finally, emergencies often involve the emergence and growth of new NGOs. This perspective is very interesting, as it usually happens in the aftermath of emergencies and brings a need to establish some kind of common understanding and adherence to principles and common standards, which NGO networks can usefully achieve.

These common traits from the Berlin presentations point to the diversity of functions that national networks can play. In the ALNAP research report 'A Networked Response?', 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.

BOX 8: A SNAPSHOT OF NATIONAL NETWORK FUNCTIONS FROM THE BERLIN PRESENTATIONS

- In Syria, the **convening function** led to national and international NGOs working together on implementation, in areas international actors cannot access – hence they are reliant on the capacity available from members of Syrian networks. Capacity-building and knowledge management across the network, particularly around adherence to standards and the development of specific ways of working in humanitarian response, which were not implemented prior to the surge of the crisis, reinforced these activities.
- In Myanmar, particularly around the response to Nargis, the national network facilitated the **convening/building acceptance function** by forming an association, advocating for greater acceptance of NGOs by demonstrating the positive achievements of NGOs in the community (at the time, in 1998, a very strict government was in place). Additionally, networks fulfilled a **convening function** by coordinating between the government and NGOs wanting to work there. Finally, the provision of aid in situations of conflict, with limited access for relief actors, was problematic. Thanks to the network's knowledge of the local context and its administrative ability, members of the opposing groups were selected and trained to facilitate relief provision in their own areas, expanding coverage.
- From Senegal came an illustrative example around the **lobby and advocacy function**: local and national NGOs' lobbying pressure constituted through a national platform was instrumental in the return of 25,000 refugees to the country. Capacity to convene varies according to the situation; in this particular case, national organisations were better placed in terms of contacts than international NGOs.
- From Burundi came an example of the **bridging/convening function**: the network facilitated joint working between the government, donors and the community, including advocacy on the adoption of standards and accountability through better monitoring of aid use and the tackling of potential corruption.

The meeting presentations echoed the key functions outlined by Scriven, and further clarified the relations between these various functions. Box 8 presents examples from different countries.

Local capacities in terms of both contextual and social knowledge and professional skilled people were often cited as strengths from the national network perspective. Speakers from Syria and Myanmar provided examples of the successful use of local capacities. Networks can also provide powerful opportunities for capacity-building, particularly where they combine capacity-building activities with implementation. One panellist explained, 'To give the capacity is giving the chance to do something, not only training. It should come with a follow-up. For example, I have a project with our network that we could do on our own, but I assign another 12 NGOs to go around and get the baseline survey so they will be able to do their own, and they have a credibility that they've done it.'[lxviii] This is in line with the preferred modalities of learning by field workers, as humanitarians massively refer to learning by doing as a preferred method of learning (Beck, Y and Borton, J, 2003).

> "In some cases there are significant constraints to building national networks. In these situations, NGOs had found it beneficial to work instead with regional structures to magnify their voice and influence capacity."

In some cases, however, there are very significant constraints to building national networks. In these situations, NGOs had found it beneficial to work instead with regional structures to magnify their voice and influence capacity. A participant in the Berlin discussions mentioned this has been the case for Somalia national organisations integrated in regional structures 'regional networks have the leveraging strength', participants from Senegal and South East Asia pointed at similarities in their respective countries. In terms of the spectrum of coordination outlined above, these networks are generally similar to Clusters: their most often-reported function relates to information-sharing: **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 sharing alignment **activities**, such as promoting good practice – often through the circulation of training materials and opportunities – and, in some cases, **collaborative activities**, as in conducting joint activities. The most common and successful joint activities (as is often the case with Clusters – see Knox Clarke and Campbell) seem to be in advocacy, as the examples in Box 8 highlighted.

Both Scriven (2013) and discussions at the meeting suggest 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.

Networks 'do exist and we often work within or with them, or in some way acknowledge their presence, but they are not part of the formal humanitarian architecture in most cases', argued the chair of the Session on networks and coalitions at national level.[lxix]

There may be increasing acknowledgement of the existence of national networks, and the Philippines after Haiyan/Yolanda is a recent example, but these networks are still largely not part of the decision-making architecture and the 'collective leadership' often mentioned during the Berlin discussions. However, where they

BOX 9: FACTORS DEFINING SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL NETWORKS

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

1. Successful networks demonstrate clear aims and goals, creating cohesion and mobilising action among network members.
2. A network's membership should be of a size and composition that create cohesion and support its functions.
3. Organisational forms and structures should enable a network to perform its given functions.
4. To succeed, national humanitarian networks and their supporters must identify sustainable funding models that protect network independence.
5. For networks to function sustainably, they must develop and maintain clear, transparent governance structures, avoiding competition and duplication.
6. National humanitarian networks can benefit from fostering external links, both nationally and internationally.
7. Networks need strong leadership to succeed, but this must be based on consensus and humility.
8. National humanitarian networks can benefit from adhering to and promoting humanitarian principles and standards.

are involved in clusters, or HCTs, national networks can provide a platform for national and local organisations to be linked with international efforts. Still, the issue of inclusiveness remains linked to who holds the power to grant access, and national networks are still knocking at the door.

4.4 NGO partnerships[lxx]

“Among the most prominent ‘northern’ NGOs are a number that have traditionally conducted humanitarian relief through partnership mechanisms. However, this model has been less common than direct intervention and partnerships with local NGOs have often been, essentially, sub-contracting relationships.”

‘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’ (Bojanic et al., 2013: 3). When addressing how to evaluate partnerships (as when talking of inter-organisational relationships in general), Berlin meeting participants highlighted the importance of a clear understanding of what the term means. John Cosgrave, an independent consultant evaluator, advanced a definition: ‘a cooperative relationship between people or groups who agree to share responsibilities for achieving a common goal, and implicit in that is cooperation, shared responsibility and a common goal’. This section considers those partnerships that are formal relationships between two humanitarian organisations, and particularly those between international organisations and national or local NGOs (Box 10).

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 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).

BOX 10: THE PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP (POP)

The Global Humanitarian Platform endorsed the PoP in 2007 as a collective effort to contribute to a more effective humanitarian response. As 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, but not the concept of partnership itself. As Knudsen (2011:5) 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 others' mandates, obligations and independence and recognise each others' 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 reality based 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 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 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, 2011:5).

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).

Eman Ismail from CARE Jordan highlighted one challenge associated with establishing partnerships at the point of crisis. Partnership approaches that are top down, and driven by a need to respond, require local and national partners to be ready to respond as soon as the funds are available. As a consequence, in the context of the Syrian refugee response in Jordan, local partners were often not involved in the early stages of the response planning, constituting a 'lost opportunity'.

While there has been support for greater investment in partnership approaches for some time (e.g. 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 INGOs have realised 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[lxxi] 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'.[lxxii]

A recent study commissioned by five UK NGOs[lxxiii] (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).

Discussions on strengthening partnerships in Berlin **underlined the importance of shared vision of the partnership**: 'A starting point would be to have a joint and shared understanding of why we [humanitarians] want to work together.'

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 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.

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 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 fulfil their undoubted potential only 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 subnational 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.' Participants of the Berlin discussions advanced three key areas for the international system to address to increase national NGOs' agency:

- Funding: advocating for a percentage of funding allocated to national NGOs as part of disaster management law;
- Share in decision-making: push for national NGO co-leadership in coordination structures as well as a shared percentage in access to common pooled funds;
- Establishing quality control of emergency response activities through a national body, to overview the use of funds by all actors.

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What does emerge fairly clearly from the work around international–national partnerships is that, to be effective, they need to be based on long-term relationships and investment. There needs to be mutual learning and capacity development: INGOs may need to question their own approaches and priorities and see the relationship as an opportunity to build their own capacity, as well as that of their partners.[lxxiv] INGOs – and ultimately donors – may also need to rethink their funding and reporting processes to make these 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).

The issues around **power beyond access and control to funds were addressed**. Panellists and participants in Berlin also analysed the quality of relationships established through partnership. One key issue highlighted was a **trust deficit**, from a perspective of both operational capacities (whether national organisations can take the bulk of the work required) and absorptive capacities (whether local partners and NGOs have the capacity to scale up with both the timeliness required and the coverage necessary to match the scale and magnitude of needs). This is, in fact, a common criticism in emergency settings related to the pressure to deliver a timely response.

Shwoq Alamoudi from Jordan River Foundation stressed it was essential 'the partner feels trusted […] and comfortable in concentrating more on the quality, and not just to report for the sake of reporting'. Pressure to deliver and assure coverage in responses is a shared challenge for both local and international actors, as mentioned in the IASC Session, particularly in remarks shared by Lisa Monaghan from South Sudan on the pressure to report regularly on beneficiary numbers reached.

But **addressing trust means addressing power dynamics**. Some of the tactics for building trust presented during the Berlin discussions, such as 'sharing experiences rather than assuming we would like to teach local partners', require time investment. Other examples of **practical experiences and actions to overcome power imbalances** included planning and implementing joint evaluations (Jordan) and establishing mentoring and coaching relationships (Jordan, Somalia). Again, these are relevant actions that require a commitment of resources and time.

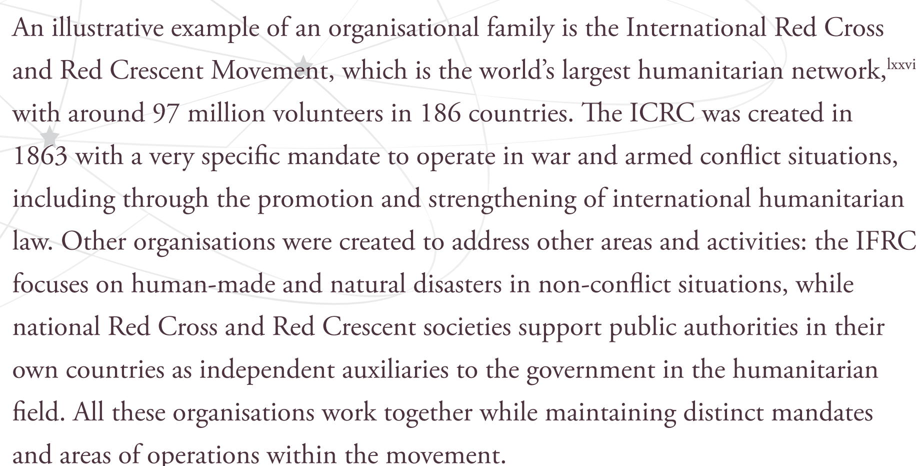
Adapting to the scale and comparative advantages of each partner in the negotiation of goals and objectives is very important, and no single formula can be used in all cases. CARE Jordan, learning from some 40 years in the country, has identified and agreed three models of partnership depending on the type of partner organisation and activity focus. 'A first model in partnership with community based organisations, working very closely with them to allow the benefits of their closeness and access to communities, a critical advantage in the work with refugee and host communities that are significantly intertwined in marginalised urban areas. A second model when partnering with well-structured CSOs; here, given their higher degree of implantation and independence, the stress of the partnership is put on mutual benefit from their well-established networks and contacts, as well as higher capacity to deliver at larger scale. And a third model of partnership with government entities at different levels, in order to focus on response on emergency in a timely and rapid manner.'[lxxiii]

The Berlin panellists did address the political nature of power-sharing arrangements and a fairly consensual message: it is required to agree on 'common values, acknowledge the value of partners to bring better understanding, have clarity of objectives and goals and on the issue of space, for decision-making and beyond'. As with all inter-organisational relationships, trust is essential, but there does not appear to be a single, easily applicable formula to building trust.

> "The Berlin panellists did address the political nature of power-sharing arrangements and a fairly consensual message: it is required to agree on 'common values, acknowledge the value of partners to bring understanding. have clarity of objectives and goals and on the issue of space, for decision-making and beyond'."

4.5 Organisational families

Responses to the scope and magnitude of the humanitarian caseload and approaches to improving the humanitarian response include other modalities of organisation besides partnership and coordination. 'Organisational families' can be defined as groupings of different but related organisations under some form of common structure. There are different typologies of organisational families; a Tufts University study distinguishes five different models (among NGOs): 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 challenges 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 organisational family is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is the world's largest humanitarian network,[lxxvi] with around 97 million volunteers in 186 countries. The 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 IFRC focuses on human-made and natural disasters in non-conflict situations, while national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies support 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. On the one hand, in the Red Cross and Red Crescent family, members can enter into partnership agreements for specific projects among themselves and/or with external actors such as governments, donors and other aid organisations. There is great variety in the partnerships that occur within and outside the Movement: to a degree, each one is unique and dependent on the context and the people involved. 'They are about people, and what we need to do is factor in the perceptions of the staff involved – what are they saying about partnership? […] Sometimes it feels like an arranged marriage and sometimes it's a match made in heaven […] Are the partners suited to each other? […] The first thing is what I refer to as the **joint humanitarian strategy or common narrative**, how do partners talk about what they are doing?'[lxxvii]

On the other hand, the movement has a broad, and more formalised, 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 IFRC in close collaboration with national societies. 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'.[lxxviii] 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 the private sector

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 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 Haiti, Pakistan and the Horn of Africa demonstrates mixed attitudes among traditional humanitarian actors to 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). 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 those 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 actors used to be seen merely as suppliers of goods and services to aid agencies and governments.[lxxix] 'Now [they are] being viewed as drivers of innovation and strategic partners' (Khiyara, 2013, 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.

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 around 7% for all recorded responses in 2013.[lxxx]

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 for 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' (ibid.: 13), and corporate giving to disasters in less commercially significant locations, such as Kashmir in 2005, has been comparatively modest (ibid.).

One basic, but important, conclusion from Berlin was that coordination with private sector actors is no easier than coordination with any other group. The barriers identified include difficulties in the identification of interlocutors; limited interaction areas and exchange spaces and disproportionate focus on fundraising and public relations, amongst others.

A specific session on the role of private sector in humanitarian response took place in Berlin. One basic, but important, conclusion was that coordination with private sector actors is no easier than coordination with any other group. The barriers identified 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.

There is a vast diversity in the forms and modalities of engagement of private sector actors in emergency and disaster response. Three key issues emerged from the session:

- **Diversity of perceptions:** 'They see us as one' – both sectors seem to perceive a homogeneity in the other group when the reality is more nuanced for both humanitarian and private sector actors.
- **Different modalities of engagement:** ethical considerations (environmental, related to humanitarian principles) and integrity issues are critical – humanitarians often aim to select partners on the basis of reputation and brand association. The Ebola Private Sector Mobilisation Group (EPSMG) in West Africa illustrates this point (Example 2).
- The **importance of identifying a diverse set of humanitarian actors, based on the comparative advantages of each**: 'We have to get beyond this unitary actor assumption' focusing on what capacities and how much we need and go sector by sector analysing domestic actors, international companies and where are the problems and issues.'[lxxxi]

The private sector has engaged least in conflict-related crises. Private sector actors appear to be more willing to support humanitarian action in situations of natural disaster than in conflict (Zyck and Kent, 2014). 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.

EXAMPLE 2

THE EBOLA PRIVATE SECTOR MOBILISATION GROUP (EPSMG): A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AND PRIVATE SECTOR

EPSMG is a coalition that started with 24 companies and now covers more than 250 companies with operations in West Africa. These companies were seeing their operations affected by the Ebola epidemics and wanted to get involved in the response. At the same time, the Sierra Leonean Red Cross was short of the vehicles required to respond.

Departing from different motivations, private actors had an interest but did not necessarily know how or with whom to engage in the humanitarian sector. In initial conversations, key challenges arose, such as humanitarian principles versus private interests, with private companies wanting to limit their collaboration to their areas of intervention ('my district, my staff'), while humanitarians had to 'defend' that, in an epidemic, you cannot establish such limitations.

The EPSMG exemplifies a collaboration that goes beyond funding or provision of services; all companies, including some that compete with each other, have set up a governance unit to learn how to collaborate among themselves and with the humanitarian sector. Private sector actors have acquired a better understanding of the different actors, resulting in an extension of the number of partners beyond the Red Cross to 'collaborate with WHO [World Health Organization], MSF and other [UN] agencies', according to Christine Tokar.'[lxxxiii]

And as other humanitarian–private partnerships generate questions around ethical considerations, in the case of EPSMG, according to Tokar, the Red Cross had 'several criteria associated to environmental considerations, how the private sector has engaged […] in the past'. Research on the companies is undertaken and requires validation by the board of trustees prior to any agreement on the partnership, and clear goals and limits are established.

> "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 in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe."

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.

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 interests and priorities of private sector staff often determine the modalities of involvement.

Benefits might also be less tangible: humanitarian work is often perceived as a moral, religious or national obligation, and concern for the wellbeing 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.

For traditional humanitarians, a growing global caseload and an increasingly market-based approach to the provision of services will mean increased work – either in partnership or in competition – with the private sector. This will mean addressing prejudices (in both directions), and also legitimate questions around motivation for engagement and the application of humanitarian principles. In many countries affected by disasters and conflict, significant partnerships between the humanitarian sector and the private sector are already in place, for instance in cash- and market-based responses. One panellist highlighted that, 'In order to be better prepared to do cash, especially e-transfers, we need better relationships with the private sector, and longer-term partnerships to move faster, to lower cost, to have better set of adaptations for existing products for humanitarian use.'[lxxxiii] Humanitarians will also need to address the perceptions of their traditional supporters: as one panellist put it, 'Humanitarian agencies operate in a very contested arena where you have multiple audiences looking, scrutinising […] beyond the reality of the behaviour and the activities of business, how are they perceived by key stakeholders […] is critical for security, for access.'[lxxxiv]

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. During the Berlin discussions, participants underlined the importance of informal fora for coordination that are distinct from the formal meetings. The MSF representative in the opening panel, Ulrike sVon Pilar, linked the issue of informal relations and communications with the complex issue of trust; 'evidently we don't trust each other'. However she added, 'we know that coordination and collaboration works where people personally know each other and can work together'. A further discussion highlighted the importance of informal networks at both national and local level, and suggested that these networks could be even more useful it they were recognised by formal structures.

> "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."

New technology has augmented the possibilities of capitalising on informal relationships to collaborate in humanitarian activities. A concrete case shared by CARE International use of new technologies for collaborative monitoring, tapping on informal networks. In CARE's remote monitoring of programmes in Somalia and Syria, Internet and other social media tools are used as means for crowdsourcing, obtaining and triangulating information from partners on the ground.

Informal 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. As they are marked by trust, and are seldom recorded, they enable exchanges around sensitive topics such as security. 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 consortia (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[lxxxv]

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 ECHO regional strategy for malnutrition during the Sahel drought and food security crisis in 2012 pushed for the integration of WASH, health, 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.

Another example where funding contributed to joint and coordinated work is the RRM. One panellist[lxxxvi] presented the example of RRM as implemented in CAR.[lxxxvii] This rapid response mechanism is an inter-agency initiative that launches multi-sector assessments in areas affected by a shock with humanitarian consequences. It builds on formal coordination mechanism, in this case particularly Clusters: information is rapidly disseminated to and through Clusters to the wider humanitarian community in country. Real-time information on needs enables humanitarians to analyse geographical and sectoral gaps: if the Clusters agree these gaps exist, RRM funding is used to address them. Up to March 2015, the five INGOs active in the CAR RRM conducted 19 exploratory missions, 11 multi-sector assessments and eight responses with wide coverage of CAR territory.[lxxxviii] The RRM supports coordination efforts by the formal Cluster mechanism in place and contributes to increased coverage, avoidance of duplication and adaption to evolving needs, particularly those related to situations of displacement. The current RRM in CAR has a budget of $12.2 million with funding provided by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF), ECHO, Swiss development cooperation and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) general funds.

Another modality of funding that can contribute to collaborative approaches is streamlining funding allocations, as the ECB country consortium in Indonesia illustrates (Wilson, 2010). Channelling funding to a group of organisations in this way will tend to ensure closer cooperation (up to the level of collaborative working, as defined in Section 2 above) 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. The original aim of the ECB consortium in Indonesia was to build common approaches to good practice: the consortium – as the name suggests – existed to build capacity, not to support coordination during a response (ibid.). However, over time, it moved to take 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 alignment around WASH and emergency shelter, ensuring they avoided duplications and filled gaps. A year later, in response to the earthquake in West Sumatra, the consortium went further.

BOX 11: HOW FUNDING CAN ENABLE WORKING TOGETHER

In Berlin, a panellist presented a new approach being implemented by some donors, particularly in situations of chronic humanitarian need, of multi-year funding and planning, including coordinated efforts both among actors involved and, by expanding the programme's life, through time.[lxxxix] This approach enables different agencies and organisations to work together, coordinates their activities and planning and facilitates coordinated monitoring and evaluation systems.

Aviles underlined that 78% of the humanitarian spend is on protracted crises. This, coupled with a projected growth in humanitarian needs that is not necessarily being accompanied by an increase in funds, means a growing gap exists, a 'persistent 30% funding gap on unmet needs'. This means this new approach could represent a relevant evolution in the sector.

Multi-year planning and funding processes aim to learn from previous crises. Aviles pointed at humanitarian system failures to respond early – Horn 2011 and Sahel 2012 – as examples of these protracted, multi-sectoral crises, where the scope of needs demands a coordinated approach to increase coverage in both geographical and sectoral areas of work.

In terms of the benefits, predictability of funding potentially enhances planning and coordination among involved stakeholders, eliminates recurrent costs and lowers operational costs. Meanwhile, there are 'clear institutional and legal impediments for some donors in undertaking this', as well as tensions around 'flexibility versus accountability'. Ultimately, a question arise on whether humanitarian financing actually funding developmental type activities. Indeed in this sense, a participant raised a concern that humanitarian finance is not necessarily going to change chronic situations, and other solutions are needed.

Coordination increased between all members (although it was entirely voluntary, and in some cases members did duplicate one another's work), and members 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 the participant 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 (ibid.).

BOX 12: 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%).

CERF	CHFs	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. 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. Top recipients in 2013 absolute numbers were: • Sudan: $47 million • Syria: $40 million • Ethiopia: $24 million	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. UN and NGOs that are part of the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) are eligible. Top recipients of all funding in 2013 were: • Sudan: 18% • South Sudan and DRC: 11% each • Somalia: 14%.	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. NGOs, both national and international, are eligible. 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; Grünewald 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.

Pooled funds provide flexibility, and ideally would increase the speed of disbursement and reduce the reporting burden – but, as the chair of the panel on funding in Berlin asked, are they also an effective tool for improved delivery through working together?[xc]

Evaluations of the various pooled funds suggest 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 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' (ibid.: 76). In Kenya, it 'enhanced coordination at the HCT level […] and sectoral coordination and partnership including [with the] government' (ibid.: 74); in El Salvador, it 'promoted cooperation between UN agencies, the government and NGOs' (ibid.: 70); in Mongolia, it was noted as 'reinforcing coordination and information sharing mechanisms' (ibid.: 79); and in CAR, it 'pushed for more exchanges and coordination between agencies' (ibid.: 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' (ibid.: 65).

An 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[xci] (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' (ibid.: 11). Specifically, they 'serve as encouragement for the HC to play an active role in interagency coordination' (ibid.: 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' (ibid.; 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' (ibid.: 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' (ibid.: 14). The tensions created by funding have been noted in NGO networks and consortia (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 the UN 'owns' Clusters (which are often involved in applying for and allocating CERF funding).

Issues around control of funds, who accesses them and how they are allocated go beyond pooled funds. Competition in accessing funds was mentioned frequently during the meeting as a challenge to coordinated and collaborative work. What perhaps makes pooled funds different is that they coordinate not only the activity of operational agencies but also those of donors: by putting resources into a 'pool', donors are giving up a certain degree of autonomy in favour of potential improvements in effectiveness and efficiency. And, as with other areas of humanitarian coordination, the agencies (in this case donor agencies) differ in their approach and appetite for coordination. Some countries give a great deal to pooled funds; others prefer to keep funding under their own control – in some situations,

at least, to have 'humanitarian funding as part of their foreign policy' a participant noted. One panellist put this clearly:[xcii] 'It is crystal clear that some of the member states have, or want to have tight control over what is happening with their money, rather than giving it into a pool where it is un-earmarked and they lose the control over their money.' Anke Reiffenstuel complements this: 'From a donor perspective, pooled funds are very convincing when we talk of humanitarian principles of neutrality and interests […] you don't earmark, you don't tag.'[xciii] Ahmed Abdi from Somali Aid pointed out a concrete example from Somalia, where a dwindling donor pool of funds, particularly in 2014, could be attributed to a trend to move away from aid according to the need versus aid tied to foreign policies.

A further negative impact of funding can occur when coordination groups become preoccupied with funding to the exclusion of other issues. This may mean 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).

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. The Berlin discussions acknowledged the constraints to effective response in terms of delays. One panellist suggested that 'the overall duration with regard to the Country-Based Pooled Funds is in the vicinity of 51 days',[xciv] which can be potentially damaging depending on the type of crisis – and particularly in sudden onset emergencies. These delays can disproportionately affect poorly resourced – particularly national – actors.

Indeed, while common funding mechanisms – on balance – appear to support coordination among international actors, it remains difficult for national actors to engage as partners or members of funded 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 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.

Some participants pointed out a need to avoid conflict of interest by separating coordination, funding and implementation structures. Feasibility and compatibility with current humanitarian governance structures would require an analysis context by context, but the debate continues.

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 'align') 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; in others, a degree of peer pressure may be involved. This seems often to be the case with guidance issued by country Clusters:

EXAMPLE 3

HOW THE ALLIANCE OF SPHERE ADVOCATES IN THE PHILIPPINES IS IMPROVING QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH SPHERE STANDARDS DISSEMINATION

The Alliance of Sphere Advocates in the Philippines (ASAP) is a coalition of organisations that do joint work on standard adherence in humanitarian responses. Roderick Valones,[xcv] from Lutheran World Relief, one of the founder organisations presented this case in Berlin. He explained that, during orientation on the Sphere standards to families affected by the floods in 2012, one person asked them, 'Why now, why only during emergency response?' So ASAP was born, initially with three member organisations supported by Sphere, whose six core standards include coordination and collaboration as a critical ingredient of effective humanitarian responses. By 2013, ASAP counted 10 members; in 2014, it had 18, and the ambition of mainstreaming the Sphere standards into the disaster preparedness and risk reduction programmes of the government and civil society as well as private sector initiatives.

Roderick noted two examples of improved quality and accountability across the group of agencies involved in ASAP. First, alignment on the basis of the Sphere standards enabled the provision of protective gear to disaster-affected families engaged in waste management activities and recognition of their work through the provision of an ID. A second example was a coordinated increase in the quality of assistance provided through the shelter programme activities.

Finally, Roderick highlighted that ASAP had pushed for proper coordination and collaboration, and a key lesson had been the realisation that its best results had been obtained through sustained work, beyond reacting to emergencies.

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, the Sphere standards can serve as a basis and starting point for more organised cooperative action and alignment. 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: it will be interesting to see what effect this common standard has on inter-organisational cooperation.

6. Conclusions

The feedback from participants in the 30th ALNAP Annual Meeting in Berlin praised the relevance of the topic and the articulation of the contents and discussions. It was particularly appreciated that the meeting brought together 'diverse perspectives on an important issue that affects us [humanitarians] all'.[xcvi] This paper reflects the mix of stakeholders – with a wide range of actors, donors, implementers, UN and academics – which in Berlin was highlighted as a strength, particularly 'the inclusiveness of the meeting voices and perspectives and the large amount of speakers from the global south and grass root community level '.[xcvii]

At the same time, the wide variety of organisational relationships discussed – bilateral partnerships,; networks,; formal coordination bodies; and processes that lead to better coordination – makes it difficult to establish a single template of 'what works'. Building upon the specific good practices for particular types of collaboration and coordination are outlined in the sections above, we'll now attempt to reflect around some broad points that seemed to underpin many of the varied discussions.

The first point that emerged from the meeting is, simply, that inter-organisational relationships are so central to the whole humanitarian sector that any discussion about these relationships becomes a discussion about the strengths, potentials and weaknesses of the humanitarian 'system' itself. In particular, these discussions bring three of the most salient features of humanitarian action into sharp relief:

1. the number of actors involved in humanitarian preparedness and response

2. the great diversity among these actors, both on constituency representation and views (and particularly, the lack of consensus among them on what 'humanitarian action' actually is, leading to very different priorities and objectives)

3. the existence of very significant power relationships and imbalances in the sector.

Against this background, it can be hard to determine whether coordination is a means to an end – a way of meeting people's needs more effectively – or whether it is an end in itself. When discussing relationships between international actors, coordination tended to be seen as a means to an end: , an essentially transactional relationship where short- term benefits outweighed short- term costs. However, when considering the relationships between international and national actors, discussions leaned towards the moral and normative elements of working together, and the longer term or more 'developmental' potential of relationships, as well as the immediate value in terms of response effectiveness.

A related question that arose on several occasions at the Meeting was: how much coordination is enough? Where coordination was seen as an end in itself, then the answer would generally be: 'the more coordination, the better', which seems to be the default assumption. But panels and discussions also suggested that it is possible to have 'too much coordination', where its costs – in terms of time, speed, and the loss of independence and diversity of opinion – outweigh the benefits. This can be particularly the case when an organisation values shorter-term, operational benefits over longer-term, developmental ones.

These different ways of understanding the potential value of a relationship highlights how much perceptions matter to the success of coordination and other inter-organisational relationships. Perceptions occur at several levels. Different actors will have different perceptions of what 'coordination' means in relation to its and how much resource to devote to any relationship, for instance. They are also likely to have different perceptions of what 'good' humanitarian action looks like, and so have different objectives for any partnership or coordination relationship. Finally, they may have specific perceptions of other groups (of the UN, or governments, or the private sector, for example) which can assist or impede effective coordination. Clarity around these perceptions and (often untested) assumptions should be the basis for more stable relationships.

Experiences across many of the sessions suggested also that trust matters, as requirements of flexibility and transparency on how decisions are made (and resources are allocated, accessed and controlled) came up repeatedly in the Berlin discussions. The challenge here often lies in developing trust in the short time periods that characterise much of humanitarian action (or, at least, much of humanitarian funding).

Finally, participants at the meeting consistently underlined how much power matters. Many bilateral 'partnerships' are established more as sub-contractual agreements between a powerful fund holder and a less powerful implementing organisation. Similarly, 'coordination' groups can serve the interests of the most powerful member or body doing the coordinating. In these situations, the 'coordinator' exerts control over the rest of the group, or uses the forum to extract information for their own use. In most cases discussed at the meeting, it was international bodies who possessed the power in these relationships. However, we should be careful not to reduce this to an 'international: national' debate. It is – in fact – a debate about relative levels of power, and how power is used: in some cases states, or powerful national NGOs, may also use partnerships and coordination in this way.

Interestingly, some conversations at the meeting suggested that structures may not matter as much as has generally been thought. Formal inter-organisational structures (clusters, teams, networks, partnerships, and so on) have tended to be the default approach to humanitarian coordination. However, these structural approaches can be resource- intensive and fairly inflexible. Alternative ways of achieving effective coordinated action may be through the use of common standards, tools and procedures – an approach that seems to be gaining ground in the humanitarian sector.

So, where will this discussion go in the next few years? We asked participants how well the system is doing in terms of coordinated, common and joint activity. In general, there was awareness of the daunting challenges ahead but also many positive signs. There has been significant evolution in the past decade: more coordinated action; efforts to get increasingly further away from a 'cookie cutter' approach; much greater recognition of the role of civil society and national actors; a common acknowledgement of power disparities within the sector and some genuine attempts to address these. The limits of humanitarian action continue to be pushed and with the projected growth of humanitarian needs in the coming years, coordination at field level will remain a critical but difficult topic at the centre of the humanitarian agenda.

7. Endnotes

i. Attribution of this concept is disputed between A.H. Maslow (1966) and A. Kaplan (1964) and is also referred as the law of the instrument.

ii. Elias Sagmeister, Global Public Policy Institute, session on **How to Evaluate Partnerships and Other Collaborative Approaches**

iii. Ulrike Von Pilar, Head of Humanitarian Issues at Médecins Sans Frontières Germany, at **Keynote panel at 30th ALNAP Annual Meeting**

iv. 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.

v. **v** 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 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.

vi. ACF (as part of RRM), ACTED (RRM), AHA, Caritas Bouar, Caritas Kaga Bandoro, COHEB, COOPI, DRC, FCA, Intersos, IRC (RRM), NRC (RRM), Plan, PU-AMI (RRM), SCI. Solidarites (RRM), UNICEF and Yamacuir

vii. See Box 3 on evaluation of coordination for a discussion on the OECD DAC criteria and their limits.

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

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

x. For additional details from Vanuatu and other countries, see **https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLdj_WJXmfmz496eoFSfQtO1vWlKCf79fJ&v=DsRnsZYA5iY**

xi. See Louise Mooney, Oxfam Australia, 'Your Story in 5' **video** for details.

xii. Listen to the sound cloud of the session, with examples from Lebanon and Jordan brought by Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, the American Red Cross, Mercy Corps and the UN Refugee Agency: **http://www.alnap.org/what-we-do/effectiveness/meeting-2015**

xiii. 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.

xiv. Emmanuel Tommy, Sierra Leone Red Cross, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xv. Carla Lacerda, Lebanon Cash Working Group Coordinator, session on **Working Together around Cash-and Market-Based Responses**

xvi. Personal communication, August 2014.

xvii. Nurhaida Rahim from Partnership Initiative Syria, session on **NGO Networks and Coalitions at National Level**

xviii. Nurhaida Rahim, Coordinator at Partnership Initiative, session on **NGO Networks and Coalitions at National Level**

xix. John Cosgrave, Independent Consultant, session on **How to Evaluate Partnerships and Collaborative Approaches**

xx. Based on Knox Clarke and Campbell (2015). The phenomenon of various degrees of coordination in the humanitarian sector has been noted elsewhere (Grünewald et al., 2010; Staples, 2011).

xxi. Anne Luzot, World Food Programme, session on **How to Evaluate Partnerships and Other Collaborative Approaches**

xxii. For additional details and access to the publications, see **http://www.aidmi.org/publications.aspx**

xxiii. **ALNAP 30th Annual Meeting Keynote Panel**

xxiv. For details, see **http://foodsecuritycluster.net/working-group/programme-quality-working-group**

xxv. By addressing common difficulties of project coordination in a joint manner, partners achieved simplified reporting. This enabled the improvement of quantity and quality of information, which in turn made it easier to share and cross-analyse between Clusters: tools evolve and constantly improve as they are 'tweaked' and new lessons are learnt, with no wheel reinvention: for each new emergency, the starting point is more advanced.

xxvi. Listen to the complete session on the sound cloud available for session 1.3 here: **http://www.alnap.org/overlay/36**

xxvii. Josse Gillijns, International Federation of Red Cross, session on **How to Evaluate Partnerships and Other Collaborative Approaches**

xxviii. Anne Luzot, World Food Programme, session on **How to Evaluate Partnerships and Other Collaborative Approaches**

xxix. OECD DAC criteria were initially based on the need to respond to the most common flaws of development projects in the 1970s and 1980s. During the complex emergencies of the 1990s, given the scope and magnitude of these crisis, coverage was added as a key criterion in assessing humanitarian responses. The same applies for coherence, given the linkages between humanitarian and political action revealed by some of these complex emergencies of the 1990s.

xxx. Lisa Monaghan, Protection and Advocacy Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council South Sudan, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, Inter-Cluster Coordination Mechanisms and Clusters**

xxxi. Koorosh Raffii, Emergency Specialist, UN Children's Fund, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

xxxii. A multi-agency learning and accountability initiative established in February 2005 and hosted by the ALNAP Secretariat.

xxxiii. For additional details on the Contribution to Change approach to evaluating disasters, see: **http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/contribution-to-change-an-approach-to-evaluating-the-role-of-intervention-in-di-305537**

xxxiv. For additional information on the DEC quality and accountability framework and its initiatives, see **http://www.dec.org.uk/about-dec/how-we-ensure-quality**

xxxv. Additional information is available at **http://parcelproject.org/**

xxxvi. Concern Worldwide, MercyCorps US, Save the Children International, Tearfund, World Vision International, Action Contre la Faim, and five Oxfam affiliates.

xxxvii. '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'. For the whole text, see **www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r182.htm**

xxxviii. Charles Antoine Hoffman, Senior Thematic Advisor, World Humanitarian Summit, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xxxix. For details, see evaluation report and the response management to the evaluation: **www.oxfamintermon.org/es/documentos/21/08/14/evaluacion-final-interna-republica-dominicana-mayo-2014-echo**

xl. Personal communication, Kevin Misenheimer, US Forest Service, December 2014. Countries using such systems include Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the Philippines.

xli. 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.

xlii. Brian Grogan, Senior Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xliii. Bertrand Thaite, Director, Humanitarian and Conflict Responses Institute, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xliv. An example of these tensions between governments and humanitarian actors can be found with the introduction of counter-terrorism legislation (see Burniske et al., 2014).

xlv. Bertrand Thaite, Director, Humanitarian and Conflict Responses Institute, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xlvi. Hugo Grotius (in De jure belli ac pacis, 1625) suggested this idea long ago. There are examples during the 20th century but it was not until the 1990s that the doctrine known as 'humanitarian intervention' appeared first as a legal argument in UN multilateral interventions (Kennedy, 2004: 259).

xlvii. Bertrand Thaite, Director, Humanitarian and Conflict Responses Institute, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xlviii. Bertrand Thaite, Director, Humanitarian and Conflict Responses Institute, session on **The Role of Governments in Emergency Coordination**

xlix. At least in an L3 response, the most recent guidance on Clusters concentrates on this type of response.

l. Real-time evaluations have considered the role of HCs and HCTs (Grüunewald 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.

li. '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).

lii. Cyril Ferrand, Global Food Security Coordinator, Food and Agricultural Organization, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

liii. Of 25 evaluations and case studies reviewed, 16 were broadly positive, five broadly negative and four unclear.

liv. Lisa Monaghan, Protection and Advocacy Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council South Sudan, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lv. Julia Steets, Director, Global Public Policy Institute, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lvi. Senior Director Transformative Agenda, **ALNAP 30th Annual Meeting Keynote Panel**

lvii. Julia Steets, Director, Global Public Policy Institute, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lviii. Carla Lacerda, Inter-Agency Senior Cash Adviser, Save the Children/UN Refugee Agency, session on **Working Together around Cash- and Market-Based Responses**

lix. Cyril Ferrand, Global Food Security Coordinator, Food and Agricultural Organization, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lx. Session on **NGO Networks and Coalitions at National Level**

lxi. Although recent ALNAP work (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2015) suggests this may not be as much of a problem as previously thought – many large Clusters have found ways to take decisions quickly and effectively.

lxii. Director, Transformative Agenda Implementation Team, session on **The IASC coordination system: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lxiii. Lisa Monaghan, Protection and Advocacy Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council South Sudan, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lxiv. Cyril Ferrand, Global Food Security Coordinator, Food and Agricultural Organization, session on **The IASC Coordination System: Humanitarian Country Teams, ICCMs and Clusters**

lxv. Although it should be noted that, of these 4,480, the SOHS suggests 31% of funding goes to only five international NGOs/federations: MSF, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision International and the IRC (ALNAP, 2015).

lxvi. Listen to the presentations and discussion that took place in Berlin on the sound cloud here: **www.alnap.org/overlay/39**

lxvii. Legal Representative, Human Health Aid Burundi, session on **NGO networks and coalitions at national level**

lxviii. Khin Maung Win, President of Community Development Association, Myanmar, session on **NGO Networks and Coalitions at National Level**

lxix. Manu Gupta, Director of SEEDS, session on **NGO Networks and Coalitions at National Level**

lxx. Session on **North/South NGO Partnerships**

lxxi. **https://partnerplatform.org/alnap/partnershipsandcapacity**

lxxii. **http://www.start-network.org/how/start-build/#.VJQdopDpABg**

lxxiii. ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Tearfund.

lxxiv. 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).

lxxv. Eman Ismail, Programme Director, CARE (Jordan), session on **North/South NGO Partnership**

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

lxxvii. Josse Gillijns, Head of Planning and Evaluation, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, session on **How to Evaluate Partnership and Collaborative Approaches**

lxxviii. **http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/at_a_glance-en.pdf**

lxxix. This section draws heavily on Zyck and Kent (2014).

lxxx. See **http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/GHAreport2015/**

lxxxi. Gilles Carbonnier, Director of Studies, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, session on **Collaboration and Coordination between Humanitarians and the Private Sector**

lxxxii. Christine Tokar, Programme Adviser for West and Central Africa, British Red Cross, session on **Collaboration and Coordination between Humanitarians and the Private Sector**

lxxxiii. Lilly Frey, Electronic Cash Transfer Officer, Mercy Corps, session on **Working Together around Cash- and Market-Based Approaches**

lxxxiv. Gilles Carbonnier, Director of Studies, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, session on **Collaboration and Coordination between Humanitarians and the Private Sector**

lxxxv. Session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

lxxxvi. Koorosh Raffi, Emergency Specialist, UN Children's Fund, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

lxxxvii. The RRM was first implemented in DRC and has now extended to CAR, South Sudan and Iraq.

lxxxviii. For detailed information on the RRM in CAR, see **www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/system/files/documents/files/RRMBriefingNote.Mar15rev2.docx**

lxxxix. Sandra Aviles, Senior Advisor at Humanitarian Affairs Programme Development, Food and Agricultural Organization, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

xc. Anke Reiffenstuel, Head of Task Force for Humanitarian Aid, German Federal Foreign Office, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

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

xcii. Rudolph Müller, Deputy Director and Chief- Emergency Services, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and former Chief of the CERF Secretariat, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

xciii. Anke Reiffenstuel, Head of Task Force for Humanitarian Aid, German Federal Foreign Office, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

xciv. Rudolph Müller, Deputy Director and Chief- Emergency Services, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level** and see also remarks by Koorosh Raffii, Emergency Specialist, UN Children's Fund, session on **Common Funding Mechanisms at Country Level**

xcv. See video at **https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLdj_WJXmfmz496eoFSfQtO1vWlKCf79fJ&v=l0EdPMxqPNs**

xcvi. UN constituency, participant feedback form to ALNAP Annual Meeting, Berlin March 2015

xcvii. Southern NGO constituency, participant feedback form to ALNAP Annual Meeting, Berlin March 2015

8. Bibliography

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