

ALNAP's coordination workstream

Over the past several years, ALNAP has approached the topic of coordination in a number of different ways. Previous research has looked at **humanitarian networks**, **coordination with NDMAs**, **working together in the field**, the **humanitarian clusters**, and **what humanitarians could learn from emergency management coordination**.

In the course of our most recent study – which looked at the humanitarian clusters in detail – we also encountered examples of challenges and successes of coordination in other humanitarian and non-humanitarian fora. Building on this body of work, ALNAP will organise a high level meeting in June 2016 bringing together coordination expertise from across the humanitarian sector (including HCTs, the Clusters, NGO consortiums, cash coordination groups) as well as outside of the humanitarian sphere (emergency management, regional and developmental coordination bodies, academics) to address common coordination challenges, share learning and identify concrete recommendations to move forward.

October roundtables

In order to identify existing work and solidify the common coordination challenges, ALNAP held two roundtables: one in Geneva (5 October 2015) and another one in Nairobi (12 October 2015). These brought together expertise from within the Shelter, WASH and Nutrition Clusters as well as colleagues from ALNAP Member organisations.

Over 115 individuals participated in the roundtable sessions. Acknowledgement and gratitude goes to the Global Shelter and Global WASH Clusters for helping us to organise the two events, as well as to IFRC whose offices in Geneva and Nairobi hosted both roundtables.

Coordination challenges

Based on themes identified in our recent work on coordination as outlined above, ALNAP identified five common coordination challenges to explore in these roundtables: sub-national coordination, the role of national actors including government and national NGOs, trust, information management and decision-making/roles/responsibilities.

ALNAP shared findings from our cluster research on each topic, and then participants were asked to discuss their own experiences around these challenges, identify any existing work to address coordination in these areas, and develop recommendations for improvement. The key messages and recommendations from these discussions are below.

Sub-national coordination

ALNAP's research on sub-national coordination highlighted this as an area of concern. Despite a recognition of the importance of getting it right, ALNAP identified few examples of effective sub-national coordination. Role clarity, regular communication, involvement of sub-national coordination actors in national level planning, and having a clear understanding of local context were identified as factors contributing to successful sub-national coordination.

At the roundtables, some participants proposed that there were effective examples of sub-national coordination, but that these had not yet been effectively documented. Participants also expanded the discussion to include the role of inter-sectoral (inter-cluster) coordination.

Between the two roundtables, the following recommendations were made:

1. Global Clusters, IASC and OCHA should identify best practice and lessons learned, and then produce guidance, based on successes and failures of sub-national coordination. As part of this analysis, a range of sub-national coordination options could be explored, from a 'focal point' individual, through to a fully resourced sub-national coordination team. The implications of double hatting should also be further explored.
2. Cluster Lead Agencies should ensure they are taking co-lead responsibility for sub-national coordination, and supporting local authorities and communities to also co-lead, including ensuring clear responsibilities, accountability and facilitating capacity building.



Participants discuss coordination issues in Geneva workshop.



OCHA should take a leadership role in helping national clusters to identify where sub-national and inter-sectoral coordination are not working effectively.



3. National Clusters, working with HCTs and governments, should identify criteria to assess where coordination is most necessary at sub-national levels and review this regularly (Global Clusters and OCHA can support this by helping to identify criteria which can be used to help assess when sub-coordination is needed).
4. Donors and Cluster Lead Agencies should allocate funding for dedicated sub-coordination in those areas where it is deemed necessary.
5. OCHA should take a leadership role in helping national clusters to identify where sub-national and inter-sectoral coordination are not working effectively.
6. Global Clusters should consider different models for sub-national coordination.
7. OCHA should share work previously done to map the existence of sub-national coordination staff to help inform work on these issues.
8. Global Clusters should reflect on what level of decentralisation is most useful, including what decisions should be delegated to sub-national clusters, and how connections between national and sub-national clusters can be maintained and supported.

The role of national actors (government, national NGOs)

The role of national actors was another area identified in ALNAP's research as needing further improvement. Challenges included lack of capacity/time, an undervaluing of coordination in the face of competing priorities, language and technical barriers, mistrust, and different attitudes to coordination. Often, though the desire and intent for inclusion was there, time pressures to respond meant inclusion wasn't possible. Where governments had been involved in Clusters, a leadership role was found to be more effective than simply participation.

At the roundtables, participants identified the following recommendations:

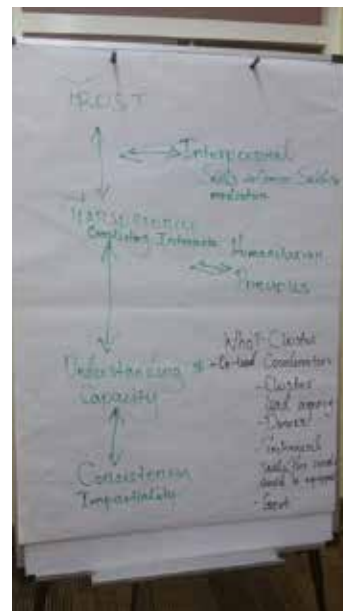
1. Global Clusters/OCHA should document the experiences of national actors within the Clusters with a view to identifying lessons learned going forward.
2. Global Clusters/OCHA should develop a tool to assess the capacity of national coordination platforms and how we assess 'appropriate' leadership. Humanitarians should reflect on the flexibility of our systems, and consider how humanitarians can fit into existing platforms rather than creating duplication.



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3. Global Clusters/OCHA should develop a matrix to understand which actors are most appropriate/useful to involve in coordination at country level, including private sector and non-traditional actors.
4. Current work being undertaken to understand transition by the Global WASH and Nutrition Clusters should be continued, and the results widely shared.
5. Guidance should be developed to better understand technical government counterparts at various levels of a response.
6. Humanitarians in all areas should increase efforts to understand existing governance and coordination systems, and incorporate this knowledge into planning. Preparedness efforts should then be able to identify appropriate interlocutors and address expectations ahead of time.



Recommendations around trust in Nairobi workshop.

Trust

ALNAP's research found that coordination was more successful where Cluster Members shared higher levels of trust. Trust was found to support information exchange and reduce competition. While some Clusters have been able to establish a 'culture of trust' over time, other influencing factors include leadership approach of the Cluster Coordinator and other Members as well as personality and personal relationships.

Roundtable participants identified the following recommendations:

1. Donors should justify fund allocation by need to reduce competitiveness which reduces trust.
2. National Clusters should ensure equal participation and transparency in role allocation, particularly for decision-making and pooled funding processes.
3. Cluster Coordinators should practice non-partisan leadership, strive for team decisions, emphasise common goals, keep commitments and make use of their interpersonal skills.
4. Cluster Members should recognise and respect the expertise and experience of their colleagues, recognising the importance of understanding the context and valuing contextual knowledge.
5. Cluster Members should reflect on the risks posed by trust, and decide what level of risk they are willing to take, and what reward it offers.

“Donors should justify fund allocation by need to reduce competitiveness which reduces trust.”

Information Management

ALNAP's research highlighted information management as both a function of coordination and an important factor of success. While Clusters for the most part were found to be successfully collecting information, they were not addressing the other information functions (planning, processing, analysis, dissemination, feedback).

Roundtable participants noted that while information collection may be working better than other aspects, improvements here are also needed.

Recommendations from the two roundtables included:

1. Global Clusters should take steps to better understand information management, and reflect on what information is needed and what for.
2. Donors should acknowledge the importance of information management as part of coordination systems by ensuring adequate funding is available for it
3. OCHA, UNDP, Global Clusters and Governments should organise and prioritise information management in the preparedness phase and as part of emergency deployment. This should be paired with robust support for information management for national clusters throughout a response.
4. Global and National Clusters and OCHA should ensure information management, in particular collection of information, is clearly linked to decision-making/strategy setting, in order to prioritise information that is most useful for decision-making. Where a clear decision-making link is not made, information collection should be challenged.
5. National Clusters, working with governments, should ensure that information sharing is downward to affected populations and sub-national levels of coordination, as well as upwards to donors and headquarters.
6. Global Clusters should develop more participatory tools for use in Clusters.
7. Information management should be simplified – web-based systems may not be appropriate, particularly for dissemination/feeding back information. An emphasis should rather be made on identifying key stakeholders and setting up relationships.
8. In terms of innovation, more focus should be placed on data analysis, not just data collection. More work also needs to be done on quality control of information.

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9. Global and National Clusters should take steps to improve joint data analysis between Cluster Members.
10. Research organisations such as ALNAP should focus on real-time analysis, and not only rely on a theoretical/historic understanding of information management.

Decision-making, roles and responsibilities

ALNAP's research identified three decision-making models within national Clusters. The study found that decisions made by an individual were found to be no faster than those made by a group, and decision-making by a group to result in better quality decisions. However, the research also found that the presence of a clear and transparent decision-making process which all Cluster Members understood and agreed with was in itself more important than which decision-making model was actually used. In other words, it was more important that everyone knew and agreed on the process, than the content of the process itself. Additionally, the research explored the concept of collective responsibility, whereby it is easier to work with others and actively coordinate together, than to be passively coordinated by someone else.

The following recommendations were made by participants:

1. Global Clusters should develop an accountability and decision-making table which identifies who should make the decision, who should be consulted, who should be informed, etc. according to context, timeframe and strategic/technical decision type. Models should consider what role government should have, based on its capacity/strength.
2. Global and National Clusters should ensure a variety of organisations/agencies hold positions of leadership, for example heading sub-working groups. They should also ensure gender representation in decision-making, especially when the decision includes the affected population.
3. Where decisions affect an entire Cluster, the SAG should be used to narrow down the decision, which should then go to the whole group, and then be confirmed/approved by the Cluster Coordinator as final decision maker, followed by action taken by all.
4. Cluster Coordinators should identify where external expertise should be brought into the decision-making process.

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