

**Active Learning Network on Accountability
and Performance in Humanitarian Assistance**

Record of the First Meeting

1-2 May 1997

Record of the First ALNAP Meeting 1-2 May, ODI, London

In Attendance:

Raymond Apthorpe	Freelance/Australian National University
Eva Asplund	SIDA
Helen Awan	ODI
Katherine Blakeslee	USAID
Richard Blewitt	ActionAid/ICVA
John Borton	ODI
William Carlos	Dept of Foreign Affairs, Ireland
Louisa Chan	WHO
Maureen Connelly	UNHCR
Dominique Desvignes	ICRC
Antonio Donini	DHA
Karen Donovan	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
Marco Ferrari	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland
Andre Griekspoor	MSF-Holland
Alistair Hallam	ODI
Mukesh Kapila	ODA/DFID
Natalia Langlais	ODA/DFID
Mark Latham	WFP
Joanna Macrae	ODI
Xavier Ortegat	VOICE
Roger Riddell	ODI (Chair for Day 1)
Simon Robbins	ODA/DFID
John Rogge	UNDP
Nick Stockton	OXFAM
Jacques Stroun	ICRC
Laurent Thomas	FAO
Koenraad Van Brabant	ODI
Carlo Von Flue	ICRC
Peter Walker	IFRC

Apologies:

Mikael Barford/Mme Coeffard	ECHO
Jim Bishop	InterAction
Niels Dabelstein	Danida
John Eriksson	Independent Consultant, Washington
Mrs Foa	DGVIII
Ian Hopwood/Peter MacDermott	UNICEF
Ted Kliest/Joeren Verheul	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands
Alcira Kremer/Robert Picciotto	World Bank
Bernice Vincent/Carolyn McAskie	CIDA
Tarja Reponen	Finnida
Bernard Sexe	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France
Klaus Streicher/Lehman Richter	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany
John Telford	Independent Consultant, Ireland

DAY 1: 1st May

Opening of Meeting

The Chairman for the first day, Roger Riddell, Senior Research Fellow at ODI, opened the meeting.

Welcome and Introduction

John Howell, Director of ODI gave a brief history of ODI and outlined the range of evaluation work being undertaken by ODI besides that on humanitarian aid. Accountability was becoming a dominant issue in humanitarian aid and he welcomed the ALNAP initiative.

Objectives and Proposed Structure of Meeting

Following a 'tour de table' for introductions, the Chairman reiterated the objectives of the meeting:

- i) Refine and discuss the objective of ALNAP, the proposed work plan and *modus operandi* for 1997-98
- ii) Determine the criteria for membership of ALNAP and the composition of the Steering Committee
- iii) Determine the availability of funding for ALNAP activities

The objectives and proposed structure of the meeting were agreed.

Information Point: Status of the Recommendation by the Joint Evaluation Follow-up Monitoring and Facilitation Network (JEFF)

Peter Walker, IFRC restated recommendation three of JEFF's Interim Review of follow-up and impact of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, namely 'that a standing, independent capacity be established to monitor, analyze and report on progress within the international community in addressing the phenomenon of complex emergencies'. No overlap between the objective of this recommendation and ALNAP was anticipated. The Chairman asked if further clarification was required but there were no further questions.

Thereafter the meeting focused on ALNAP issues and broadly followed the structure of the Discussion Paper 'Agreeing the Ground Rules, Composition and Work Plan for ALNAP' circulated to participants a week prior to the meeting.

The Context for ALNAP: Problems of Accountability and Performance in the International System for the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance

John Borton presented the main points from Section 2 of the Discussion Paper.

In the following discussion further clarification was called for of terms such as 'humanitarian'. Also clarification was required of the boundaries of ALNAP. For instance should ALNAP include humanitarian emergencies not responded to? Should it include consideration of the accountability of states involved in providing support to combatants in a conflict generating the humanitarian needs?

References in the presentation to various accountability-related initiatives led to the Chair inviting short presentations from participants on relevant activities that they were involved in or were aware of. Information was provided on the following:

- European Court of Auditors report on Humanitarian Aid from the European Union 1992-95;
- InterAction's Field Protocols initiative;
- UNHCR's partnership agreements with NGOs;
- Status of the ECOSOC Review process and in particular the outcome of the Inter-Agency Sub-Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation;
- ODA's (now DFID's) Humanitarian Guidelines;
- SIDA's Humanitarian Assistance Guidelines.

Relevant documents were tabled and copies made available to participants.

Meeting ALNAP's Objectives

John Borton presented Section 3.1 of the Discussion Paper which indicated the goal and purpose intended for ALNAP.

Discussion revealed two principal concerns which continued to be expressed during the remainder of the first days discussions.

The use of the term 'neutral space' in describing ALNAP's objectives was one concern. Personnel working in funding, channelling and implementing agencies who were involved in day-to-day operational and funding discussions with each other would find it difficult to completely set these aside in participating in ALNAP discussions. Such discussions were bound to be conducted with an awareness that an ALNAP member worked, for instance, in a large and influential donor organisation, a powerful UN agency or a particular NGO. Discussion could still be valuable but it would be unrealistic to expect ALNAP to be able to provide 'neutral space'. The term 'forum' might be more appropriate.

Concern was also expressed at the proposal that ALNAP should be made up of a 'closed' group. It was paradoxical for a group committed to increasing accountability and transparency within the humanitarian system to be closed to wider participation. How would the outcomes of discussions within ALNAP be shared more widely within the system? John Borton explained the thinking behind the notion of a closed group of 30 members. For agencies to share evaluation reports which may be confidential required

trust between members that the confidential status of the reports would be respected. For the proposed e-mail discussion group to operate efficiently required that the numbers participating be limited. In addition, a limit on the number of members was desirable for logistical and budgetary reasons (particularly in relation to the six-monthly meetings) and to ensure that a broad balance be maintained between the numbers of funding, channelling and implementing agencies represented in ALNAP. These concerns were noted.

John Borton then presented the proposed Activity A (Documentation of humanitarian aid evaluations) and proposed Activity B (Comparative analysis of humanitarian aid evaluations).

The following discussion covered a range of issues.

- NGO evaluations were often not placed in the public domain because their status was often ambiguous - one part of the agency may have agreed with the study whilst another part did not.
- ALNAP should not just concern itself with evaluation reports as there were many more reports available than just evaluation reports which covered accountability and performance issues in an analytical way .
- There was a very real need for information on how to evaluate humanitarian programmes and how best to manage such evaluations.
- ALNAP should be realistic over the likelihood of confidential reports being shared. Would it not be better for agencies to share whatever they felt comfortable sharing. As confidence in the mechanism increased so more material would be shared.

John Borton then presented the proposed Activity C (Biannual Seminars) and proposed Activity D (Moderated e-mail discussion group). Discussion indicated the need for the purpose and focus of the Seminars to be more clearly defined. Some scepticism was also expressed about the value of the proposed e-mail discussion group. Some members had recent experience of e-mail discussions which had been unproductive and time-consuming.

Joanna Macrae then presented proposed Activity E (Two annual in-depth studies). Three possible topics for the initial studies were suggested.

- i) The effectiveness and implications of operating principles recently adopted by humanitarian agencies operating in conflict zones.
- ii) Experience in the use of logical framework analysis by donor and implementing agencies in the provision of humanitarian assistance.
- iii) The scope and limitations of rapid participatory appraisal. monitoring and evaluation techniques in complex political emergencies.

The following discussion revealed a range of concerns over the subjects, how they had been selected and how it was intended to undertake them. Some participants felt it was too soon for ALNAP to be agreeing on particular studies. Membership of ALNAP should be finalised and basic 'mapping' work undertaken of the gaps in existing and planned work elsewhere before agreement could be reached on the specific subjects to be studied within the ALNAP framework. Some participants felt it would be appropriate to assume that ODI would be involved in all the in-depth studies and that it would be appropriate for a range of research institutes to be considered for undertaking the studies, possibly following a tender approach to selecting a particular institute. It was felt that some of the studies would

benefit from a collaborative approach between researchers and those agencies with a particular interest in the issue being studied - for instance ICRC, DHA and UNICEF in relation to the proposed study on Operating Principles.

In response it was explained that specific proposals were being put forward in response to requests for clarity on what activities ALNAP might undertake in its first year. The three studies being proposed resulted from Joanna Macrae and John Borton's perception, based on related studies and discussions in other fora, of where the key gaps in knowledge currently lay. They conceded however that it was too early for ALNAP to be agreeing on specific in-depth studies and it was agreed that such decisions should be deferred until the next meeting of ALNAP which would take place in September/October 1997. In order to inform discussion

at that meeting, some background work would be required to identify other potential subjects for in-depth studies, the relative justification for proceeding with each study and to indicate more clearly how the studies might be undertaken.

The chair brought the first days session to a close and thanked participants for their contributions. Participants met later for an informal dinner at nearby restaurant.

DAY 2: 2nd May

Joanna Macrae chaired the second days session.

She began by indicating the points of consensus reached the previous day:

1. There was a significant agenda to be addressed on accountability and performance of humanitarian aid interventions. There was a need for an independent space to discuss and take this agenda forward.
2. ALNAP should adopt an incremental, iterative and pragmatic approach.
3. ALNAP should not strive to circulate and discuss confidential evaluation reports; rather it should aim to increase the transparency of the evaluation process
4. By excluding confidential material, the emphasis would be less on defining who should sit in a "closed society" than a question of what constitutes a manageable sized group.
5. Different stakeholder have difference perspectives on what accountability means and how it should be achieved. However there appeared to be a shared interest in:
 - a. Sharing the results of evaluation studies
 - b. Discussion of evaluation methodologies and approaches to the management of the evaluation process
 - c. Comparative and independent analysis of evaluations
 - d. Analysis of the policy implications of key findings
6. In-depth studies should not be initiated until ALNAP is established and it is proven that there is a clear demand for either the studies proposed or other studies

7. In-depth studies should not necessarily be carried out by ODI. Rather ALNAP should be used as a vehicle for members to commission and manage research as an integral part of carrying the agenda forward.

John Borton then explained how in response to some of the concerns expressed the previous day that, in a departure from the agenda, participants would be divided into three working groups to discuss and provide feedback on ALNAP's objectives, membership, structure and activities in the light of the points of consensus. In order to allow free discussion Joanna Macrae, John Borton and Mukesh Kapila would not participate in the working groups.

The report back by the three groups revealed broad support for the concept of ALNAP with ODI serving as the secretariat and an iterative, 'natural growth', approach.

Report Back: Group A

Group A felt that ALNAP should concentrate on the following activities for its first year:

- i) A sharing of the results of evaluation studies and undertaking further analysis to synthesize the results.
- ii) Improving the understanding of the institutional context of learning within organisations and how lessons-learned from evaluation studies are absorbed and applied.
- iii) Analysis of the policy implications of key findings arising from the evaluation and synthesis studies
- iv) Description and analysis of differences of approach between agencies to reporting, monitoring and evaluation.
- v) Sharing information on plans and ongoing studies

Group A felt that momentum should be maintained and that the first biannual seminar should be held by October, ie. within the next 6 months. The e-mail discussion should be limited to ALNAP members but wherever possible the conclusions of the discussions should be shared widely and perhaps put on a Website/Bulletin Board. For the purposes of the e-mail discussions organisations should nominate a focal point within each organisation; those who received it would not necessarily answer all the questions, but could pass them to the most appropriate persons within their organisation.

Group A supported points 1-5 on the list of Points of Consensus but proposed that the activities suggested above should replace point 6. On point 7, the group suggested that ALNAP should plan to initiate in-depth studies as priorities emerged from discussions within ALNAP.

Report Back: Group B

The points of consensus were broadly agreed. In addition, the group suggested that ALNAP should be an open, interactive forum and a vehicle for the exchange of views and experiences. It should provide an environment where its members could learn from each other and, in particular, better understand each other, with a diversity of participation. Achieving better understanding might sometimes be more important than reaching a

consensus. There was a need for clarification of such phrases as 'humanitarian aid' and the identification and selection of subjects for the in-depth studies could be taken forward via the e-mail network.

The goal and purpose for ALNAP indicated in the Discussion Paper were agreed by the Group. Information on other initiatives being undertaken both bilaterally and internationally should be provided. It was also agreed that the ALNAP group should reconvene in a few months to review progress.

Group C

The group felt that ALNAP's goal should be amended slightly to read "to improve the quality *and accountability* of humanitarian assistance programmes." The Group felt that the specific objectives of ALNAP should be modified as follows:

- i) To identify, share and uphold best practice in the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation effectiveness of humanitarian aid.
- ii) To move towards a common understanding of accountability and quality in relation to humanitarian aid.

In support of objective (i) the following activities should be undertaken:

1. ODI should act as the secretariat for ALNAP, collecting, cataloguing and sharing evaluation studies and other analytical reports
2. ODI should develop global 'network of experts' to do comparative analysis of methodologies, syntheses, research reports, setting standards, etc
3. Best practice should be promoted through seminars and presentations at conferences
4. Electronic network should be established for peer support, information sharing etc.

To achieve objective (ii) the following additional activities should be undertaken:

5. Identify reporting formats that would allow for more commonality and comparison between agencies, undertake comparative analysis of agencies in terms of their procedures and approaches, and promote best practice.
6. Promote dialogue between the donor community and implementing agencies through existing fora and, where necessary, develop new fora.

The Group agreed that there was a significant agenda on the accountability and quality of humanitarian aid and there was certainly a need for 'space' for interested parties to take forward that agenda. In starting the Network the Group felt that priority should be given to:

- a) Setting up the database;
- b) Beginning to add value to it so it did not just become the recipient of 'dead discussion';
- c) Establishing the e-mail network with the database being developed so as to build on this.

The Group felt that the biannual seminars should focus on evaluation methodology and management and in addition review the quality and impact of evaluations.

Discussion following the reporting back by the three Groups covered a wide range of issues.

The proposal by Group C that ALNAP should establish a global network of experts was regarded by some as being problematic. Whilst the database would serve as a record of all those who had been involved in undertaking evaluations of humanitarian aid, the notion of a network of experts required that a judgement be made as to the quality of the work done and the contribution by each evaluator.

It was agreed that the process of identifying appropriate subjects for the in-depth studies could be assisted by some stock-taking and exploratory work over the next few months using the network for the exchange of views on the general theme of the 'principles of humanitarian aid'. In discussion of the role of ODI in relation to other organisations that might be involved in undertaking the in-depth studies the point was made that ODI should be involved in some capacity to ensure the objectivity and quality of the work done.

Some of the participants felt that ALNAP's first priority should be to define more clearly terms such as 'humanitarian aid'. Others felt that it would be more productive to concentrate on defining the boundaries of ALNAP, ie. what it would and would not cover. Its primary focus should be on the provision of humanitarian aid from the standpoint of accountability and quality rather than the broader politics.

Meeting ALNAP Objectives: Membership Structure and Composition

A consensus had already been reached that ALNAP should be 'open' rather than 'closed'. John Borton indicated that whilst there would probably not be pressure for more than 8-10 representatives for bi-lateral donor organisations and a similar number for UN agencies, a large number of NGOs were potentially interested in participating in ALNAP. The decision to invite NGO umbrella organisations (SCHR, VOICE and ICVA) to attend this first meeting had been taken to avoid ODI determining which NGOs should be involved. Whilst the move to an 'open' network was welcomed, care was needed to ensure that approximate balance was retained between the funding, channelling and implementing agencies at the biannual seminars and in the governance structure adopted.

It was agreed that 'southern' NGOs should be encouraged to participate in ALNAP to ensure their perspectives were represented in ALNAP's discussions. The representatives of NGO networks present were requested to consider which 'southern' NGOs would be most appropriate and to provide the contact details of those recommended.

The question of participation by 'southern' governments was raised. Following discussion it was agreed that, in principle, any government could participate provided they were demonstrably committed to humanitarian action. It was agreed that this phrase should be used as a criteria of membership, ie. that ALNAP should be open to any "interested organisation which is committed to humanitarian action". Where 'southern' governments did participate it would be important to encourage representation by those government officials actively involved in issues concerned with humanitarian activity. Those present were requested to suggest 'southern' government officials who would be able to actively contribute to ALNAP.

Suggestions of additional names for the Academics/Independents group of ALNAP members was also sought.

Governance, Management and Funding

John Borton presented Section 4 of the Discussion Paper. The role of the Steering Committee would be to provide oversight of the Network between the biannual seminars. He explained the approach suggested in the Discussion Paper that members making financial contributions above a certain level would automatically participate in the Steering Committee.

Many participants felt that it was inappropriate to link the scale of financial contributions to membership of the Steering Committee. ALNAP was intended to be a forum for exchange where members would, as far as possible, participate as equals. This ideal would be undermined by a governance structure which was likely to be dominated by bilateral donor organisations and which was constructed on 'different classes' of membership. It was therefore proposed to separate the mechanism for reporting on the use to which funds were put from that of the Steering Committee.

Joanna Macrae proposed that the Steering Committee's membership should comprise representatives of 2 bilateral/multilateral donor organisations, 2 UN agencies/department, 2 NGOs, 1 representative of the Red Cross Movement and 1 academic/freelance member. After discussion, it was agreed that the question of the academic representation be deferred and that IFRC and ICRC have a representative each. It was further agreed that ODA would not seek to be a member of the Steering Committee.

Whilst ALNAP's membership would not be finalised for another few months and formal nominations sought for representation on the Steering Committee would not be possible until then, it was agreed to establish an Interim Steering Committee to cover the period until the September/October meeting and with whom the secretariat could liaise.

Names were proposed and were accepted for some posts on the Interim Steering Committee:

Bilateral/Multilateral Donors:	Eva Asplund, SIDA; William Carlos, DFA, Ireland
UN agencies/Departments:	Maureen Connelly, UNHCR; Antonio Donini, DHA.
NGOs:	Andre Griekspoor, MSF-H; one other to be nominated by SCHR/ICVA/VOICE.
IFRC/ICRC:	Names to be provided.

Mukesh Kapila (ODA) raised the question of financial commitment from organisations represented to match ODA's contribution of £60,000 to start-up costs. It was expected that the annual budget would be in the region of £100,000 though the actual level would be heavily influenced by decisions relating to the in-depth studies to be taken at the September/October meeting. Several participants had already indicated their willingness to contribute (SIDA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Switzerland, Department of Foreign Affairs Ireland, FAO, UNHCR, Oxfam) but it was recognised that these organisations and others which might contribute would require documentation indicating the revisions made to ALNAP during the course of the meeting and a budget revised in the light of agreement reached in the meeting.

John Borton summarised the outcome of the meeting highlighting those areas where modifications had been made to take account of concerns expressed by participants during

the meeting. All participants and those who were unable to attend would shortly receive a report of this meeting together with a paper summarising the objectives, composition and workplans as agreed at the meeting together with a revised budget.

It was agreed that a meeting would be held no later than October, possibly in Brussels, by which time the groundwork on membership, procedures and research studies will have been carried out.

Mark Latham proposed a vote of thanks to ODI for its efforts in preparing for and hosting the meeting and to ODA for its initiative in supporting the ALNAP initiative.

Joanna Macrae thanked all the participants for their constructive contributions and brought the meeting to a close at 13.00.