

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In September 2000, the Policy Development Unit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) commissioned the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to undertake an independent study on humanitarian coordination. The aim was to sharpen thinking on UN humanitarian coordination in the light of processes underway in the UN. These include debates on how the UN chooses coordination arrangements, the report of the UN Panel on Peace Operations – the Brahimi report<sup>1</sup> – and OCHA's own Change Management Process.

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Draw lessons from recent experiences in humanitarian coordination.
2. Understand the advantages and disadvantages of UN coordination models – that is, the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator or so-called 'combined model', the model where the Humanitarian Coordinator is separate from the Resident Coordinator, and the 'lead agency model' – in particular circumstances.
3. Identify features of coordination arrangements which have provided 'added value'.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) further specified a range of questions on specific aspects of coordination including the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), access, information, sectoral coordination, strategic monitoring, and the relationship between humanitarian, development, political and military actors.

The study's methodology was a review of studies of coordination over the last decade, more than 250 interviews with UN, NGOs, the Red Cross Movement, governments, donors and the military, and three case studies of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Kosovo, each based on a week-long visit by the study team. Although the study's focus was the coordination of, and by, the humanitarian agencies of the UN system, as the range of interviewees suggests, the study drew on the experiences and perspective of all those implicated in UN coordination.

The study team encountered a number of constraints, one of which was to address the broad scope of the study and do justice to the wealth of material gathered. Interviewees also challenged the ToR's neglect of humanitarian coordination in natural disasters as a perpetuation of the division between those working in and on natural disasters as opposed to complex emergencies.

## SECTION 2: COORDINATION – AN OVERVIEW

### 2.1 Historical Overview

The UN humanitarian system is composed of six key actors – UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO and UNDP – each established by separate treaties, with its own governance mechanism. The first attempt to establish a comprehensive framework to organise this system was General Assembly Resolution 2816 of 14 December 1971, which created the Office of the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) 'to mobilise, direct and coordinate relief.' UNDRO was not a success, and two decades later, prompted also by dissatisfaction with other ad hoc coordination arrangements and Gulf war experiences, General Assembly Resolution 46/182 was passed.

Resolution 46/182 created the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), among other measures. The following year, the Secretary-General established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) headed by the ERC, also designated Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. In 1994 the IASC approved ToR for Humanitarian Coordinators and in 1997 further refined the options and the criteria to select them.

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<sup>1</sup> Brahimi, L. (2000) *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations A/55/305 S/2000/809* (United Nations: New York) August.

As part of the 1997 reform programme of Secretary-General Annan, the DHA was replaced by a new office with a more streamlined mandate focused on coordination, advocacy and policy development: OCHA.

Today, the combined Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator model exists in 14 complex emergencies, the lead agency model in two cases, and six countries have separate Humanitarian Coordinators.

## 2.2 Defining Coordination

While defining *why* coordination is important may be not be contentious within the UN, defining who coordinates and how it is done provokes fierce debate. Distinctions between strategic and operational coordination are used to fight inter-agency battles about who does what, and reinforce the impression that there are areas of humanitarian response that are unrelated to strategy and all that this implies by way of analysis, goals and monitoring. Also unresolved is whether coordination is a minimal activity preventing duplication and overlap or a more integrating activity that seeks to harmonise responses as part of a single programme or strategy.

**One of the definitions used repeatedly in past studies of coordination stood out as potentially useful to the UN:**

*Coordination is the systematic use of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner. Such instruments include strategic planning, gathering data and managing information, mobilising resources and ensuring accountability, orchestrating a functional division of labour, negotiating and maintaining a serviceable framework with host political authorities and providing leadership.<sup>2</sup>*

This definition emphasises coordination functions that are often missing or weak in UN humanitarian coordination. These include:

- The importance of using policy instruments in systematic ways – that is, in an organised way according to established procedures rather than in an ad hoc manner;
- The emphasis on cohesion, bringing elements of a response together;
- The focus on planning, managing information, accountability, functional divisions of labour and sustaining frameworks with political authorities.

## 2.3 The Changing Context of Humanitarian Coordination

This study was required to focus primarily on the conduct of UN coordination within the humanitarian system. Such an ‘intra-humanitarian’ focus can obscure the significance of political and military actors in facilitating or obstructing humanitarian action. The frequent absence or weakness of legitimate government to prioritise and implement policy creates the UN’s coordination challenge in the first place. The violence and insecurity facing civilians and those that seek to help them are also sickeningly familiar challenges to humanitarian action and its coordination.

Newer challenges include the increasing fragmentation and bilateral management of resources for humanitarian assistance, and thus a reduction in the share of resources received by the UN. Humanitarian aid as a share of rich countries’ wealth is also falling. This is a clarion call for advocacy.

Donors are making greater demands of humanitarian actors to uphold performance standards and increase accountability. For some, this requires greater field capacity to scrutinise and even coordinate humanitarian activity. Case studies suggest there are some donors – the European Commission in particular – who have the capacity and interest to fill any coordination vacuums left by a discredited or ineffective UN. The consequences of this remain unexplored.

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<sup>2</sup> Minear, L., Chelliah, U, Crisp, J., Mackinlay, J. & Weiss, T. (1992) *UN Coordination of the International Humanitarian Response to the Gulf Crisis 1990–1992* (Thomas J. Watson Institute for International Studies: Providence, Rhode Island) Occasional Paper 13.

The added momentum given to debates on peacebuilding strategies by the Brahimi report, with its as yet undefined role for humanitarians in such activities may prove the latest attempt to explicitly coopt humanitarian action to deliver on wider political goals of peace and security. This could have commensurate coordination difficulties as NGOs and other humanitarians are forced to distance themselves explicitly from a non-neutral UN in the interest of preserving their humanitarian identity, central to efforts to sustain access to civilians in need.

## **SECTION 3: OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES TO COORDINATION**

While the context sketched above presents some of the external challenges to the UN's coordination role, the study focused in greater detail on challenges more internal to the UN. Past studies, interviews and case studies reveal a picture of structural, institutional and management obstacles to coordination.

### **3.1 Structural Obstacles**

Although described as a system, there is little about the combined structure of the UN's funds, agencies and programmes that is systematic. Each is required to respond to the often-divergent imperatives set by their different governance structures influenced by the political interests of UN Member States. In the same way, while donors vociferously demand coordination, donor earmarking, micro-management, visibility concerns and political agendas all thwart it. Donors have also proved weak at coordinating themselves.

UN agencies' demonstrated preoccupation with securing donor approval further weakens the coordination imperative. The push for profile necessary to attract funding posits sister agencies as competitors in a market they perceive to be shrinking. OCHA appears particularly vulnerable in this environment that makes market competitors out of humanitarian collaborators as donor enthusiasm for OCHA appears to correlate directly with UN agency mistrust.

### **3.2 Institutional Obstacles**

The competition for funds exacerbates institutional cultures that foster agency allegiance over system-wide loyalty, where staff commitment to coordinated outcomes is neither required nor rewarded. Agencies have proved unwilling to release their 'best people' for secondment into coordination functions, preferring to retain them to deliver their agency's mandate. Some argue that maintaining effective agency operations has the greatest direct impact on beneficiaries – the fundamental concern for humanitarians. Yet effective coordination increases the impact of the overall response. Requiring staff to coordinate and seconding skilled staff to play co-ordination roles are essential to the system's performance.

However, where Coordinators are perceived to have vested institutional interests – for instance, having joint responsibility for operations and coordination – they are likely to attract hostility and be unsuccessful in their coordination role. This is also true of the UN system as a whole where some agencies are prone to focus on UN matters to the exclusion or neglect of NGOs and the Red Cross Movement, who are key players and partners in humanitarian response.

### **3.3 Management Obstacles**

Weak management compounds these structural and institutional difficulties. Such weakness is manifest in the 'ad hoc' that this study concludes characterises the UN's coordination. Comparing one situation to another, there is little that is done in a systematic way. While some claim this shows flexibility, it in fact reveals decisions not made, conflicts not resolved, and the influence of politics on management decisions. This appears to be true of all levels in the UN. In practice it results in staff with unclear roles, responsibilities, reporting lines and accountabilities, and huge numbers of people sent into the field with little induction or guidance on fundamental matters.

Ad interim arrangements are another facet of this ad hoc approach that highlights one of the apparent ironies of 'flexible' arrangements: they are both vulnerable to be changed at any moment, and may be left to fester with dysfunctions going ignored. They are also a prime example of how adhococracy puts a huge onus on individuals to work things out on the ground. On the positive side, not having requirements or systems set in stone offers room for innovation. Negatively, the weak management associated with adhococracy allows the incompetent to underperform or create chaos. Such adhococracy seems to be built into the UN system, both as a product and cause of the resistance to coordination.

### 3.4 The Ingredients of Success

In the face of such obstacles, coordination is against the odds. However, **coordination does happen where contexts conducive to coordination dilute the impact of obstacles**, such as small numbers of humanitarian agencies, where relationships among agencies have been built over time, and where shared technical expertise facilitates communication and increases focus on how to achieve shared goals rather than agency profiles.

**Coordination also happens where incentives to coordinate are increased** – whether because agencies have to work together in the interests of their own security or to achieve access to beneficiaries, or where donor or media scrutiny requires it or supports it. Coordinators vested with control of access or funds at critical stages in the response also provided a powerful incentive to others to coordinate, provided these elements were in the hands of those with a mentality of inclusion and service-orientation.

**Agencies can be persuaded to coordinate where coordination clearly adds value.** A crucial ingredient here is leadership. Two key elements in leadership are effective managerial skills and analytical skills that offer clarity, structure and direction for both field operations and humanitarian advocacy. The team was struck by the significance of the ‘intellectual route’ to authority and influence within the UN. Committed, experienced, competent Coordinators who foster trust, build teams, and focus on humanitarian response rather than an agency add value. Yet adding value also depends on having sufficient and skilled support staff to perform essential coordination functions.

If adhocism is one of the obstacles to coordination, so **making coordination more systematic** is its antidote. Although removing many of the obstacles to coordination depend on the actions of Member States and donors, the above analysis suggests the UN will maximise the likelihood of effective coordination by consistently ensuring that:

- Coordinators have sufficient competence, management skills, dynamism and vision to give them authority to persuade or encourage others to coordinate.
- Coordinators have elements of command at their fingertips, such as control over funding and access, in order to increase the incentives or requirements of others to coordinate.
- Coordination is carried out by those who do not have vested institutional interests but rather provide services for the whole system, and for whom coordination is a full-time job.
- The Coordinator is supported by skilled staff to perform essential functions and services.
- There is effective accountability for coordination through clear structures and reporting lines, including clarity on who deputises for the Coordinator and what his/her responsibilities will be. This requires monitoring and assessment to ensure that good performance is rewarded and poor performance is sanctioned.

The benefits of planning in advance, having rosters of available staff and well-written Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are also ingredients of more systematic responses.

Yet there is **one further key ingredient** for effective humanitarian action and coordination upon which even the best laid plans and procedures depend: a focus on the people who are in need. No structures or incentives can compensate for lack of commitment to an effective, coordinated response to the needs of beneficiaries.

## SECTION 4: THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF COORDINATION MODELS

The previous section set out some of essential ingredients of effective coordination, namely that it is recognised as a full-time task requiring particular skills and competencies, and that it must be resourced, performed and respected as such. The coordination role requires skilled support teams, clear lines of accountability for coordination, and that coordination is carried out by players with no vested interest who perform a service for whole system.

These ingredients should have a bearing on how the UN selects coordination arrangements. They provide clear criteria for any coordination structure to fulfil. Yet the study concluded that the selection of coordination arrangements seems only weakly connected with both the lessons from past performance and the demands of the context. The interests of the Secretary-General and the major UN operational agencies seem to prevail in decisions that focus on the top of coordination structures – that is, how they get led – and pays little attention to specifying what and how coordination services and functions are provided. (Tensions around the roles, responsibilities and reporting relationships of OCHA field staff are a direct result of this.) Thus the study concludes that the **IASC should focus more on specifying the composition, functions and competencies of coordination teams and structures, not solely responsibilities at the top.**

Although the study disputes that the models as specified by the UN are the key determinants of coordination outcomes – arguing that the role of host governments or authorities, the actors involved in coordination and their respective geographical location, and the nature and frequency of coordination activities are all significant – the study presented assessments of their respective strengths and weaknesses.

The combined role of **Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator** provides a sense of uniformity to arrangements globally, and can contribute to bridging the relief–development gap. UNDP’s willingness to bear the cost of coordination is another point in its favour. Yet many interviewees expressed doubts about Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators’ ability to carry out robust humanitarian diplomacy, for example, on the rights of refugees or IDPs. The fiercest criticism is the lack of humanitarian coordination experience or skills of existing Resident Coordinators. The study concludes that **if the Secretary-General and IASC members continue to favour appointing Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators, this should be accompanied by a number of measures to mitigate the disadvantages**, including a pool of candidates that are agreed to be suitably qualified, more rigorous performance monitoring, and decisive approaches to replace those not up to the job.

The logic behind the use of the **lead agency model** is undeniable. Where one agency is overwhelmingly present, it makes sense to use the infrastructure in place for the benefit of coordination. In theory the model also appears attractive because it comes closest to institutionalising ‘command functions’ within one agency. However, in practice the evidence suggests that it has **not been possible for an agency with operational responsibilities to coordinate for the benefit of the system**. Lead agencies have tended to mould the emergency in their own image, to favour their own programme rather than focus on the overall response, and to interpret coordination as control. Yet lead agencies have insufficient control to compel others to coordinate, and in practice have undertaken insufficient consensus-building efforts to persuade others to coordinate. If there were effective personnel rosters to establish rapid response coordination teams in the earliest days of an emergency, the problematic option of carving capacity out of the lead agency would no longer be necessary.

The team concluded that there is a **strong case for the IASC to favour the Humanitarian Coordinator being separate from the Resident Coordinator**. This is not least due to concern at the dearth of suitable candidates for the positions of Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and the slow pace at which the pool of competent candidates is being enlarged. It also stems from a recognition of the scale of the challenges faced in humanitarian coordination such as the importance of leadership in overcoming the obstacles to coordination within the UN, and the importance of advocacy and negotiating access. This is so particularly in cases of large-scale rapid onset emergencies where territorial control is divided among belligerents. The team was struck that this opinion was widely held among interviewees. Their view contrasted with that of the IASC in arguing that this option should be the rule rather than the exception. To address the risk that separate Coordinators entrench false distinctions between relief and development in intellectual or

operational terms, the UN will need clear strategies to guide its action and strong collaboration among all those on the ground. Secondments from operational agencies to the post of Humanitarian Coordinator should be actively sought.

## SECTION 5: HOW COORDINATION GETS DONE

Section 5 elaborates on the study's recurring theme that effective coordination adds value to humanitarian response by performing key tasks and offering a range of services and skills to humanitarian agencies. The report sets out some of the ingredients that make such tasks, services and tools more or less helpful, as well as challenges associated with providing them.

### 5.1 Coordinating Integrated Responses – Tasks and Techniques

**Analysis:** The fact that the IASC's list of strategic coordination functions excludes analysis and that donors show little interest in agencies' understanding of their environment reinforces the notion that analysis is an optional extra. Yet in the words of one interviewee, *'Offering a compelling vision of what can be achieved based on sound analysis of context is perhaps the greatest value added ever offered to coordination.'* Such analysis underpins effective strategies, including those to ensure that humanitarian aid does more good than harm. Good contextual knowledge and situational analysis are critical elements of effective security management. Analysis is also a vital part of learning lessons, which is currently weak. Both Coordinators and their team members require strong analytical skills. Yet effective analysis also depends on techniques and systems to gather, share and manage information.

**Formulating a Strategy and Plan:** Too often humanitarian actors are unable to articulate what they are trying to achieve, or how particular actions relate to precise goals. This impairs coordination and response. This study finds that strategies are most valuable when they are based on sound analysis and focus on tackling problems in an integrated way rather than in mandate sized pieces; when they focus on providing both humanitarian protection and assistance, and include the principles and standards that will inform that approach. They should also focus on specific, measurable targets and have benchmarks against which progress can be monitored. At their best, strategies emerge from processes that allow participants opportunities for joint analysis and reflection, which includes NGOs and actors outside the UN. To get the most from joint planning requires harmonising planning tools and cycles.

**Standards:** Given the absence or weakness of any government structure setting standards, humanitarians are left to delineate their own guide for action. Without agreed standards, this may vary radically from one situation to another. Conducting humanitarian activity in a stable, predictable manner is central to fostering respect for humanitarian principles and practice. Coordination teams have central roles to play in facilitating principled responses. Yet at the field level the team found little evidence of attempts to standardise the response among agencies, beyond their expressed commitment to the Sphere standards. While the study found examples where standards had been agreed, and even where compliance mechanisms had been established, overall the lack of system-wide agreement on what standards should be used and questions about who has sufficient power or legitimacy to assess compliance predominate in most settings.

**Agreeing/Assigning Division of Labour and Allocating Resources:** Coordinators can add value by orchestrating divisions of labour so that humanitarian response meets all the most urgent needs and not solely those that conform to agency mandates or mission statements. The division of labour is done well where Coordinators have sufficient legitimacy such that agencies will accept greater direction rather than suggestion, and agencies pool resources and allow the Coordinator to suggest matching of resources and needs. To address the gaps and duplications that exist among UN mandates and the skills of NGOs, funds should be put in the hands of the Coordinators – whether small funds to cover gaps, or more radically by establishing a common fund at country-level to receive all responses to the CAP from which the Coordinator allocates funds to respective agencies.

**Advocacy:** This was an area of weakness, although a valued activity. Advocacy was often described as an end in itself rather than as a set of influencing tactics as critical to operational response as a water tank or food parcel. The study found a number of examples where Coordinators and their teams had played critical roles in coordinating advocacy actions, facilitating others, or acting as a spokesperson with warring parties, governments, donors and the media to push them to uphold their responsibilities to respect humanitarian principles. These experiences



highlighted that effective advocacy requires sound analysis of the problem, clear messages and proposals for action, the ability to seize all available opportunities, and readiness to press the difficult issues.

However, the study team was struck by the muteness of UN agencies towards donors – that is, an apparent unwillingness by the UN to criticise donor government policies. This study argues that humanitarian agencies, particularly the UN, must better manage the tension between relying on donors for funds, complying with their Executive Boards, and pressing donors and governments to uphold rights to assistance and protection.

**Negotiating Access/Securing and Sustaining a Framework of Consent:** Skilled and experienced people that negotiate access for the benefit of the UN and NGOs are highly valued by the humanitarian community. Clarity on principles and bottom lines among all those negotiating is also valuable to prevent belligerents playing agencies off against each other. Securing agreement among UN agencies on who has principal responsibility for negotiating access is also important if training and resources are to be correctly targeted. Experience suggests that negotiation is done well where negotiators have strong back up in terms of analysis and situation monitoring, and donors and governments provide additional leverage or undertake complementary diplomatic and political action.

**Monitoring Strategy:** There were strikingly few examples of monitoring the progress and impact of strategies from which to draw. Yet effective monitoring is essential in order to evaluate the positive and negative impact of humanitarian response, ensure that the response addresses changing circumstances, and to assist with context analysis and lesson learning. Where coordination teams record such information, they can act as an institutional memory function. This is particularly important when staff turnover is high and has proved useful for subsequent evaluations of the response. This highlights the value of resources being dedicated to the monitoring function.

## 5.2 Facilitating Collaboration – Tasks and Services

As Coordinators have to build consensus in order to be effective, experience suggests coordination is imbued with a strong element of *quid pro quo*. Past experiences suggest there is a range of tasks and services that Coordinators can provide to garner agencies' cooperation. These add value to individual agency responses, facilitate collaboration among agencies, and boost the profile of the coordination structures that offer them.

**Security:** Poorly coordinated security measures can corrode the trust and collaboration central to coordination as well as place lives in jeopardy. In the face of Member States' resistance to fund additional security measures, UN agencies, who have been pushing for stronger centralised resources, have been forced to both provide funds and second staff to UNSECOORD. The IASC Security Working Group has also focused on measures to improve inter-agency collaboration on security. This study's evidence suggests that coordination teams should include dedicated capability to focus on security plans, assessments and advisories and efforts to devise common strategies. A neglected element of such strategies appears to be emphasis on the importance of building relationships with local communities in order that they use whatever influence they have over armed groups who might threaten humanitarian action and actors. It is essential that the UN is clear to non-UN agencies about what protection and evacuation arrangements the UN system can provide.

**Logistics coordination:** Agencies or Coordinators that have been willing and able to put their services and capabilities at the service of others have made a huge difference to agencies' operations and been strongly appreciated. Agreed sets of procedures for joint logistics operations have also helped collaboration and coordination. Efforts to create an inter-agency capacity to establish UN Joint Logistics Centres at the onset of a large-scale emergency is an important development in this regard. Evidence suggested that **additional useful services** include providing common communication facilities, facilitating visas and laissez-passer, providing pigeonholes, meeting space, GIS/database and mapping services, NGO liaison, a front desk service, and guiding staff through induction services and training. Well-run meetings, as well as being the most obvious tool by which information is gathered and shared, are also useful for team building, problem solving and building networks.

**Resource mobilisation:** If decentralised funding decisions emerge as an enduring trend among donors, the value attached to coordination teams involved in field-level resource mobilisation could increase. On the basis of the evidence, resource mobilisation is done well where the Coordinator does not have responsibility for a particular agency's operations and where efforts are prepared jointly. The study argues that these efforts are likely to have greatest positive impact where they are directed at system-wide responses, or even common funds.

**Information:** There is universal consensus that information sharing is the *sine qua non* of coordination activity. The capacity to filter, analyse, synthesise and present information into digestible and easily used form is a valuable service. A common theme was the high value placed on information services that are provided in an equal way for the benefit of the entire humanitarian community rather than solely for the UN or NGOs. The study outlines valued products and processes, including maps, graphs and matrixes of who is doing what where, directories of contacts, translation of local press, and the often neglected factor of access to archive material such as past assessments.

Central to improving information gathering and provision is being clear on what information is needed for what purpose, and who has the responsibility for gathering it. Minimising the duplication in data gathering and maximising its accessibility to potential users is also crucial. (Sharing information is one of the foundations of coordination, but to gather information in the most efficient way requires coordination.) Another key challenge is to solve the problem of how to gather and disseminate politically sensitive information and analysis. All this highlights the importance of having sufficient staff who have specific information management skills. Agreeing guidelines for basic data collection and dissemination is an important element in making coordination more consistently effective.

### 5.3 Tools and Structures

Humanitarian Coordinators and their teams also have a number of tools and structures that they can utilise or with which they interact. Tools include the CAP and MoUs, while structures include coordination at sectoral and regional levels as well as the IASC.

**The CAP:** For most interviewees, despite the continuous efforts to improve the CAP, there is little uniformity in how it is done, what or whom it includes, and how it is used. For many it remains a funding-focused public relations exercise with little integrated planning or prioritisation that leaves the donors to cherry pick or even ignore it. Although globally the CAP provides one of the only tools that enables comparison of international responses to humanitarian need, at its worst preparing the CAP is more oriented to estimating likely donor response than a reliable assessment of humanitarian need. However, donors continue to express enthusiasm for the CAP and to find it useful in various ways.

Although it is far from producing system-wide integrated strategies and plans, by bringing people together the CAP has the potential to be an important opportunity to do this if effectively facilitated, supported and 'marketed' to agencies. This could underpin programming, security, impact assessment and inter-agency advocacy. As an effective funding tool, it is necessary for Coordinators to be given greater authority to facilitate and ultimately perform prioritisation.

**Sectoral coordination:** Although sectoral coordination it is likely to be made easier by a shared focus among all participants, the study revealed it is not immune to the difficulties encountered in coordination in general. It can impose burdens that outweigh its benefits when the number of coordination bodies proliferates. Allocating responsibility can also prove contentious, particularly when no agency has clear technical expertise or mandated responsibility. Both donors and agencies can resist the Coordinator's efforts to address this, suggesting that there needs to be more work at the central level to build in predictability on allocating responsibilities.

Experience suggests that sectoral coordination works well where sectoral level strategies are linked to fulfilling the overall response strategy, and if full-time Coordinators are appointed at the sectoral level that are technically competent and are prepared to 'shame and blame' others into upholding their undertakings. Field units that collect and disseminate information, advise on strategies, and act as focal points for debate have also been useful. It is also important that sectoral coordination does not preclude focus on cross-cutting issues such as human rights or protection.

**Regional coordination:** As one UN interviewee commented '*It is critical for the UN to get better at this given that the problems we address do not stay within borders.*' Regional structures have, on occasion, compensated for weak support from headquarters and have offered invaluable logistics or administrative support; on other occasions these structures have duplicated efforts. Many argued that regional coordination can be best achieved by country coordination structures establishing a flow of information and analysis between them. Interviewees' key complaint concerned confusion about how Coordinators and structures at the regional level relate to those at country-level. Clarity about respective roles and responsibilities, ensuring that these are complementary rather than duplicating, strong collaboration among Coordinators, and the provision of resources to enable coordination teams within a region to come together are all recommended if regional coordination is to be valuable.

**MoUs** counter the tendency to leave UN Country Teams to negotiate continually new relationships at field level, although there is debate about the precise level of detail that is helpful. Broad frameworks where specific interpretation of language can be interpreted in a particular context are most useful. For others, this left too much to interpretation.

**The IASC** is the mechanism through which field structures are put in place. Although participants cite improvements in the IASC over time, frustrations remain. Its broad membership is seen as its most important feature. As a focus for regular inter-agency interaction, it has fostered collaborative spirit. Yet within the IASC there is a preoccupation with inclusion. Furthermore, in a body that relies on consensus, decision-making is protracted and difficult issues get dodged. This is partly because all participants report to different boards, which causes weak buy-in and accountability. But it is not helped by having overloaded meeting agendas. As a result, much substantive work gets done in the corridors.

All of this has a direct bearing on decision-making over decisions about field coordination structures. Much of this debate appears to take place outside the IASC meetings and thus minimises the role of non-UN members. Furthermore, the process appears heavily oriented to accommodating the preferences and politics of the major UN operational agencies rather than solely focusing on the demands of the situation on the ground.

The weak links between staff in the field and those in headquarters also impinge on the IASC's decision-making and effectiveness. Doubts were expressed about the IASC's responsiveness to field-level coordination difficulties. Conversely, although Humanitarian Coordinators may be invited to attend the IASC when their countries are being discussed, in the field there appears to be little interest in the IASC. However, studies and interviewees alike perceived the potential of the IASC. The words of one UN interviewee sum this up well: '*OCHA has in its hand a fantastic tool. Why doesn't it use it? Why not try to make it the voice of the humanitarian community?*'

**Thus for this study, the key areas for improvement are:**

- More focus on the situation's demands in decision-making over the appointments of Coordinators.
- Better monitoring of coordination structures in the field.
- The instigation of more systematic consultation and communication processes through coordination teams on the ground.
- Strengthening IASC-wide advocacy.

## 5.4 Conclusion

It is notable that some of the tasks that are most valued are among the weakest aspects of current coordination. These are also the tasks that have proved critical to facilitating integrated responses to humanitarian need - such as analysis, strategy setting, establishing standards, divisions of labour, advocacy and negotiating access, and monitoring impact.

A repeated theme of this study is that the UN can improve coordination by devoting more energy to building skills and capacity to coordinate response in a more systematic and accountable way. Thus the tasks and services above should be part of a standard coordination package on offer to increase the impact of response. As complex emergencies by their definition preclude a one-size-fits-all policy, such packages should be a menu of possible options and arrangements on which the IASC should decide in accordance with the demands of the particular context and emergency.

## SECTION 6: LIAISING WITH MILITARY AND POLITICAL ACTORS

The study's ToR asked whether in different settings the relationship between humanitarian, political and military actors is coherent. The term coherence is variously used: its mildest interpretation argues for political, military and humanitarian action to be mutually reinforcing, its strongest that humanitarians should be subject to political goals. What emerged from this study was the tension between the emphasis on the strong interpretation from key players in the Secretariat, and the powerful examples from case studies of the importance for humanitarians to resist this; to guard their independence not as end in itself but as the cornerstone of practical strategies to attempt to sustain a framework of consent from belligerents. This was likely to involve demonstrating separation from political and military players on the ground.

As the Secretary-General's views have appeared to shift on whether humanitarian assistance should be insulated from, or integrated into, broader political frameworks, it is perhaps not surprising that some SRSGs have been accused of having interpreted coherence as a justification for them to gain political mileage from control of humanitarian assets. Yet this perverts the very definition of humanitarian action that seeks to confer no military or political advantage. It also threatens security: As one interviewee remarked, *'Wherever we are associated with political strategies, we increase our own risk.'* This highlights the risks of misguided enthusiasm for designating Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators as deputy to the SRSG.

Separation is not always necessary. The nature of the political and military strategies and how beneficiaries and belligerents see them is a key determinant for how humanitarians position themselves. Thus silence about the nature of the strategic goals for such coherent strategies is also part of the problem. In the wake of the Brahimi report, there is renewed pressure for all aspects of UN strategies to converge around peacebuilding, which is seen as unproblematic. Yet it should not be assumed that peacebuilding is inherently apolitical. It may mask unarticulated agendas and creates the possibility that humanitarian aid is simply coopted to meet political ends.

The coherence sought or required of UN humanitarians has a major significance for their relationship with other humanitarian actors, who are ready to distance themselves from the UN. Key players in the UN Secretariat are dismissive of any dilemma, arguing that UN agencies have different responsibilities from NGOs. However, the humanitarian label links all those who use it, and such coherence could have operational impacts beyond the UN humanitarian agencies.

This highlights the need for greater clarity from all sides on the respective roles of all players in order to be able to establish a clear division of labour and to delimit responsibilities among political, military and humanitarian actors. Advocacy, clear and limited points of contact to enable information flow, and clear locations and frameworks for planning multifaceted strategies are essential.

## **SECTION 7: OCHA'S ROLE**

OCHA's invidious position of having a mandate for coordination that is undermined by a lack of authority and clout, resistance from UN agencies, and uncertain funding is a prime example of the structural obstacles to UN coordination.

Yet OCHA also undermines its frail credibility by fluctuating performance. Although providing dynamic, highly competent people to serve humanitarians has been at the heart of OCHA's success to date, all too many staff are slow to be deployed, given uncertain or no contracts, and poorly briefed. Staff turnover is high - a crippling failure for an organisation that depends on the calibre of its people. While the team were struck how UN agencies repeatedly seek to minimise OCHA's profile, OCHA also jeopardises success when it fails to consult or engage others effectively, or to give the impression that its interest in service is merely rhetorical device rather than an organisational commitment.

Setting aside the possibility of fundamental structural change, the study focuses on how OCHA can build its legitimacy and gain support by providing high quality coordination services. The study argues that OCHA should develop itself as a centre of excellence for coordination support functions at regional, country and sectoral levels. This depends on OCHA retaining and recruiting dynamic, highly competent and experienced people at the service of the humanitarian community. Thus OCHA should earn its profile by the reputation of its services for other humanitarians, and thus its impact on humanitarian response, rather than for its own sake. The study also concludes that excellence in access negotiations, political analysis and advocacy have been features of past successes and should be among OCHA's core strengths.

OCHA concedes that it has not yet fulfilled its potential advocacy role. This is particularly the case at headquarters. OCHA has a unique position as the humanitarian voice within the Secretariat. Its challenge is to both leverage its proximity to the Secretary-General's office to give it weight, while continually engaging in robust advocacy targeted at those within the Secretariat. The fact that key players in the Secretariat remain unclear about the dangers posed to humanitarian access and action by the requirements of 'coherence' signals the urgency for the ERC and OCHA to strategise with its sister UN agencies and other humanitarians about how to push this advocacy agenda. But evidence suggests that OCHA will have to work harder to convince others that it can be an effective humanitarian voice in the face of the political pressures that converge in the Secretariat.

While the onus is in part on OCHA to perform and persuade, the study team maintain that there must be pressure on agencies to respect OCHA's mandate from the Secretary-General and donors.

## **SECTION 8: CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1 The Obstacles to Change**

One of the underlying themes in this study as it presents the conclusions from past studies, interviews and case studies is that there is little new to say. The report sets out in some detail the picture that recurs over a decade of UN humanitarian agencies whose governance structures, funding sources, weak management and institutional cultures all constitute obstacles to effective coordination. It has also described the blight of adhocism that remains in how the UN system coordinates. The repeated refrains of reviews and studies suggest that a pivotal problem confronting the system is its inability to change. This is the result of resistance on the part of Member States and donors, and weaknesses internal to the system.

The evidence also reveals a 'system' that shows determined resistance to cede authority to anyone or any structure. Instead, all Coordinators have to work on the basis of coordination by consensus. In the face of the obstacles, this is an uphill struggle.

To eradicate some of these obstacles requires fundamental change. Yet despite the manifold obstacles to coordination, remarkably, humanitarian coordination does happen, although performance remains patchy. This study concludes that there is much that UN agencies can do to maximise the likelihood that humanitarian response is effectively coordinated, despite the structural obstacles and that it is incumbent upon them to do so.

This responsibility derives from the expectations of governments and humanitarian agencies of the UN's central and unique role to coordinate the humanitarian efforts of the international community. Yet this study has shown that there are others, in particular donors, who will fill the vacuum left by a UN system that fails to deliver in this coordinating role.

## **8.2 Options for Change**

Given these conclusions, the options for improving coordination range from fundamental change to remove obstacles, to more incremental ones to increase the incentives to coordinate. It is important to reiterate that none of the options for change or recommendations are entirely new. Many of them echo recommendations of studies of coordination over more than a decade. This suggests that **the problem is not a dearth of recommendations** about how to improve coordination, **but lack of both management accountability for successes or failures and sufficient commitment to improving humanitarian response.**

### **1. Fundamental structural reform of the UN's humanitarian operations**

Given the accumulated evidence that consensus models are not strong enough to achieve effective coordination in the face of chronic systemic obstacles, the study believes that there is a strong case to be made for structural reform. Notwithstanding the recent debate around UN reform, the scale of the problem suggests this debate must be reopened if there is genuine commitment to strengthening the humanitarian response of the UN.

The limited scope of this study prohibits systematic consideration of detailed recommendations. But it is clear that the challenge is to construct a body or structure with sufficient authority to be able to manage and guide humanitarian action – whether directly through a management line of one single humanitarian agency, or through a sufficiently powerful new structure that stands above existing funds and programmes to ensure prioritised and integrated responses. Such a structure should link with political actors to devise the political strategies necessary to address the causes of conflict and human suffering, as well as with development actors to ensure effective coordination between relief and development activity. Such a structure would also need to retain the elements currently fulfilled by diverse mandates; it should be both more efficient and responsive; and it should be able to relate effectively to humanitarian actors outside the UN.

In a world of conglomerating NGOs who are increasingly favoured by donors, and where there is greater momentum to integrate UN humanitarian operations into broader peacebuilding approaches, there are some who advocate that the debate should ask yet more fundamental questions about the comparative advantage of the UN. They raise questions about whether, instead of current levels of operational response, the UN should focus on 'core business' such as coordination, setting standards, upholding protection for refugees and IDPs, monitoring, and negotiating access.

### **2. Change the funding for humanitarian coordination and increase Coordinators' authority on the ground**

In the interests of more systematic and effective coordination, and to avoid those with coordination responsibilities from competing with others, OCHA should be funded from assessed contributions. At field level, in place of funding particular agencies in response to the Consolidated Appeal, donors should contribute funds to a common fund in the hands of the Coordinator who should be vested with authority to prioritise and allocate funds to the strategy formulated by humanitarian agencies in the field.

### **3. Strengthening the Current Decentralised System**

At the heart of change is the need for improved management, stronger accountability, and more systematic approaches to coordination.

The current reliance on Coordinators and their teams having to persuade others to coordinate must be buttressed by greater sanction attached to failing to coordinate. The commitment to coordination should be fostered by requiring all staff to focus on the system-wide response to beneficiaries' needs rather than solely on their agency's interests. At a minimum, all agencies must expect and instil greater discipline through conventional management lines so that personnel are assessed and rewarded on the basis of their participation and contribution to inter-agency coordination and coordinated outcomes.

All coordination structures and personnel should have clear guidance, reporting lines and defined relationships with all other key players. There needs to be greater efforts from the system to monitor coordination and to be quicker to resolve difficulties where they occur. Such difficulties should be the subject of evaluation and subsequent lessons to be learnt.

To maximise the ability of coordination teams to persuade others to coordinate, greater financial and management resources should be directed at the provision of coordination services and tools that clearly 'add value' to individual agency operations. This also requires greater leadership by high-calibre, experienced staff. OCHA has an important role to play in this.

### **8.3 The Pivotal Role of UN Member States and Donors**

Effecting any of these options requires action from several quarters. To reiterate: **any change – whether that of enduring systemic change or maximising the effectiveness of the current system – requires changes in the behaviour of Member States and donors.**

Overall, if Member States and donors want better humanitarian coordination, they must be prepared to fund coordination costs and to place their expectations only where mandated responsibilities lie. Funding coordination from assessed contributions is a vital part of this, as is establishing a fund for the ERC to pay Humanitarian Coordinators.

Among the measures to maximise the effect of the current system, donors should support the development and agreement of indicators to assess coordination and its impact as well as the contribution of agencies to it as a criterion for funding. Performance appraisal systems that assess staff on the basis of their commitment to coordination in addition to the willingness of agencies to second competent staff could be among these indicators. Donors should apply greater pressure to UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs to support and respect the role of OCHA, as well as strengthen OCHA to work for the benefit of the humanitarian response rather than its own agency profile. Donors can strengthen their coordination within and among themselves and demonstrate more consistent support to coordination through their funding and their presence on the legislative bodies of organisations (whether the UNSC, UNGA, or Executive Boards).

As well as increasing levels of humanitarian aid to ensure impartial response to all those in need, donors should provide increased resources for efforts aimed at strengthening coordination such as monitoring, appraisal, assessment and shared training. Donors should also contribute to common funds, whether small additional funds for Humanitarian Coordinators to fill gaps in the response or, more radically, a fund to receive all contributions to the CAP. Both measures should be accompanied by donor support for the Coordinator to undertake prioritisation in place of donor earmarking.

### **8.4 The Role of the Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General has a vital role in strengthening commitment to coordination and coordinated outcomes. He can lend the full weight of his authority to the ERC and insist that agencies recognise this. He can push for greater system-wide orientation. He can also encourage the heads of the operational agencies to second staff and establish rosters of those available, urge them to support the creation of common funds for management by the Coordinator – whether for filling gaps in response, or more radically, to receive all funds for the CAP – and require that they strengthen the requirement of their staff to contribute to coordinated outcomes by including this in performance appraisals.

The Secretary-General also has a critical role to play in reducing the adhocism that currently blights coordination, for instance by ensuring the implementation of the Brahimi report's recommendations that SRSGs, Force Commanders, Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators all have clear guidance, reporting lines and relationships with all other key players. (The reservations regarding other aspects of the report have been outlined above.)

Finally, the Secretary-General has important responsibilities to advocate that humanitarian action retains its independence from political and military strategies of the UN and Member States. For this to be effective, it requires clear points of contact and information exchange between political or humanitarian players. The Secretary-General must quash resistance to this in the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

## **8.5 Consolidated Recommendations to the ERC, OCHA and the IASC**

The following recommendations combine those elaborated in the text with additional recommendations based on the study's conclusions. These are among the measures that should be well within the grasp of a UN system serious about the effective coordination of action to protect the rights of human beings to protection and assistance.

### **Recommendations to the ERC and OCHA**

OCHA's Change Management Report presents a raft of recommendations to address some of OCHA's weaknesses. This report recommends the following priorities:

1. OCHA, in close discussion with IASC members, should draw together the lessons from this study as well as its current proposals for field coordination into a package of coordination services and tools, along with the prototype office structures and staff competencies associated with providing them. This can then be used as a menu of options on offer for all Coordinators. This should be presented to the IASC for agreement with an associated action plan, including a training programme, to ensure that OCHA can provide quality coordination services.
2. The ERC has a vital role to play in proactive monitoring of the conduct of coordination, particularly at the start of new emergencies, and reporting back to the IASC and to the Secretary-General. The ERC may need an enhanced monitoring and evaluation capacity that reports directly to him/her, using *inter alia*, indicators as recommended in A3 below.
3. OCHA should further strengthen the CAP as an inter-agency analysis and strategy-setting process, including working with UN Country Teams to provide analysis tools and facilitation for the process. The involvement in the analytical process of NGOs, the Red Cross Movement and UN political and military actors and analysts should be actively sought.
4. The ERC has a vital role to play in robust advocacy – both within the Secretariat and with UN Member States – on the principles, role and limits of humanitarian action, and the political action required to uphold the right to humanitarian assistance and protection. ECHA and ECPS are important fora for advocacy on the nature, challenges and limits to humanitarian action; the ERC can also press for action in the political, diplomatic and peacekeeping sphere. It will be important to strategise with other humanitarians about how to push this advocacy agenda. The IASC – given its broad membership – is the obvious forum for such strategising.

### **Recommendations to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee**

It is recommended that the IASC review the findings of this study and formulate an action plan for follow up. Among the measures that should be included are the following:

#### **A. Appraisal**

1. The UN members of the IASC should review and revise existing performance appraisal schemes for all staff. These should include criteria to measure demonstrated contribution to



inter-agency coordination and coordinated outcomes. Particular incentives should be attached to secondments to inter-agency efforts.

2. The UN members of the IASC should establish an inter-agency working group to compare and harmonise performance appraisal schemes and the rewards and sanctions associated with contributing to coordination or thwarting it.
3. The IASC should agree performance appraisal criteria and a regular appraisal process for Humanitarian Coordinators. This should include indicators for behaviour or action that would trigger a process of review leading to removal from the position.
4. The IASC should work with donors to identify indicators of coordination and coordinated outcomes as the basis for funding decisions. Performance appraisal systems that assess staff on the basis of their commitment to coordination, and the willingness of agencies to second competent staff, should be among these indicators.

#### **B. Recruitment of Coordination Staff**

1. The IASC should intensify its efforts to work with the UNDG and OCHA to agree the competencies and selection processes for Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators. This should include agreement of where skills for Humanitarian Coordinators might differ from or clash with those expected of Resident Coordinators.
2. All IASC member agencies should intensify efforts to establish an inter-agency roster of coordination staff that indicates staff skills and availability. They should do this by undertaking a thorough process of identifying individuals with aptitude for coordination positions – whether as Humanitarian Coordinators or support staff – including those with potential but who may require training.
3. The IASC should explore with non-UN members the potential for extended secondments of NGO personnel as Coordinators and support staff. This would require the agreement of potential training needs necessary for non-UN staff to work for the UN.

#### **C. Induction Processes**

1. The IASC should form an inter-agency working group on induction processes to compare current guidance and information provided to new staff. On the basis of this review, this group should develop a series of training materials and processes for generic guidance to help staff anticipate and overcome challenges. This would be provided to all staff going to the field, or as refresher courses for existing staff. Such materials should include information on mandates, activities and competencies of all IASC members, humanitarian principles, Sphere standards, impact indicators, and security, as agreed by the IASC. This could form a common UN humanitarian handbook.
2. The IASC should agree that one of the aspects of the coordination package provided by OCHA should include providing induction guidance tailored to the specific context to offer as a service to incoming staff of all humanitarian agencies. This could also have an additional benefit of encouraging staff to deepen their understanding and their political, economic and social analysis that is essential to effective humanitarian response.
3. All IASC members should commit to making handovers between staff more systematic by including them in all job descriptions as a requirement of all departing staff. At headquarters, management should be improved to increase the number of handovers that take place.

#### **D. Monitoring**

1. The IASC should agree a process to evaluate field coordination at regular intervals in order to increase both its responsiveness and ability to resolve problems. This could include a) regular reporting against agreed benchmarks to the IASC by IASC members in the field, and b) a process of small inter-agency teams travelling to the field to carry out agreed systematic assessments before reporting back to the IASC.

2. An assessment of the contribution of agencies to coordination and coordinated outcomes should be part of the process of the mid-term CAP review. This could include agency self-assessment against agreed criteria, potentially backed up by independent evaluation.

#### **E. Reporting Lines and Accountability**

1. The IASC should agree the relationship, reporting lines and accountability of all those involved in coordination, in particular between the head of the OCHA field coordination unit and the Humanitarian Coordinator.
2. The IASC should agree who will deputise for the Humanitarian Coordinator in all instances, including a protocol for further contingency arrangements should it be necessary to further deputise for the deputy. This should exclude those with responsibilities for operational programmes where there are alternatives. This makes a strong case for the head of OCHA offices being appointed as the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator.

#### **F. Country and Regional Structures**

1. IASC members should agree to replicate the IASC at the field level in all instances.
2. IASC members should adopt the same designations of what constitutes a region as a first step to facilitate regional coordination, and should work towards having any regional structures co-located with those of other agencies.
3. IASC members should instigate more systematic consultation and communication with coordination teams in the field.

#### **G. Advocacy**

1. The IASC should form an advocacy working group to agree a broad framework for advocacy strategies towards UN Member States, donors, belligerent groups, and other parts of the UN including DPA, DPKO and the Office of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, at headquarters, country and local level. This would include responsibilities for the ERC and IASC members at headquarters and in the field. It is vital that UN agencies continue robust advocacy with donors on their obligations to respect the humanitarian principles of universality and impartiality.
2. All IASC members should collaborate with OCHA in pressing UN Member States to fund coordination – both OCHA and Humanitarian Coordinators – from assessed contributions.

#### **H. Systemisation**

1. The IASC should agree a package of coordination services and likely accompanying structures to be prepared by OCHA as the basis for coordination structures in country as standard operating procedure for OCHA. This should include agreement on the potential value of OCHA having a presence in the field at sub-office level to provide effective coordination support.
2. The IASC should make clear specifications on these coordination structures, the required competencies and the reporting relationships as part of all decisions on coordination options considered by the UN and the rest of the IASC.
3. The IASC should agree a matrix of MoUs to be negotiated to complement existing MoUs.

#### **I. On the CAP, all IASC members should work with OCHA to:**

1. Strengthen the CAP as a valuable opportunity for inter-agency analysis and strategy setting, including both operational response and advocacy strategies.
2. Require Coordinators to actively seek the involvement of NGOs and the Red Cross Movement in the analysis process, if not the fundraising strategy.

3. Improve the accuracy and transparency of the CAP's assessment of target beneficiaries to increase its use as an advocacy tool. This will help in assessing and comparing international responses to humanitarian need.
4. Give a stronger remit to Coordinators to facilitate prioritised, integrated strategies to respond to humanitarian need.
5. Under effective and accountable Coordinators in an improved system of coordination, donors should be required to place their responses to Consolidated Appeals in a single country fund – rather than funding individual agency activities – in the hands of a Coordinator.