Section 10: Evaluating NGO Coordination

Given the multiplicity of actors involved in an emergency response, it is important that coordination is explicitly considered – the intervention of a single agency cannot be evaluated in isolation from what others are doing, particularly as what may be appropriate from the point of view of a single actor, may not be appropriate from the point of view of the system as a whole.


Coordination is consistently identified as being key to the performance of the humanitarian community, yet coordination activities are not frequently evaluated at the field level. Where coordination is discussed, it is usually in the context of system-wide evaluations, such as the Joint Evaluation of Assistance to Rwanda, which results in extremely broad recommendations. Such broad evaluations leave out a great deal of detail and fail to provide specific lessons to draw on for future coordination.

Coordination is rarely evaluated on its own terms, and this lack of focused evaluation has negative implications for the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. Since the introduction of the humanitarian reform process, more attention has been paid to coordination as a specific issue, particularly in measuring the performance of cluster coordination. However, these discussions focus on the clusters as a mechanism, rather than coordination as a process; since coordination does not happen solely within clusters, such focus can sometimes fail to investigate coordination outside the clusters.

The consensus is that the key metric for the success of coordination is how much it improves the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall aid effort. Unfortunately, those two terms are themselves subject to differing interpretations, and may be applied differently to different issues within the coordination effort; for example, the effectiveness of joint needs assessment must be measured differently than the effectiveness of civil-military coordination. In addition, it is difficult to identify cause-and-effect for coordination activities, which makes it difficult to evaluate coordination solely in those terms.

An expanded set of criteria has been laid out by the OECD DAC, including: Relevance / Appropriateness, Connectedness, Coherence, Coverage, Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Impact. The 2006 ALNAP guide *Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria* provides a good starting point; however it is worth noting that coordination is not like other types of humanitarian action, and in most cases has been treated only as a subset of broader humanitarian action. Another approach is to evaluate joint activities carried out by NGOs, placing coordination in the wider context, but such joint activities are still relatively rare in the field.

Without the development of clear guidance on how to evaluate coordination in the field, it is possible to identify key issues which evaluations should address. *The evaluation of coordination should reflect the objectives of the coordination mechanism itself, i.e. what did it initially set out to do, did it do it, and were the objectives relevant to improving humanitarian response in the first place?* Ideally, an evaluation approach should be decided in consultation with the members of the coordination mechanism, but also with external stakeholders such as national government, UN agencies, and donors.

This section provides some material on which you can base the development of an evaluation approach. These four approaches range from a logical framework approach with a focus on
evaluating the perceived usefulness of outputs and their impact on practice, to modifying the OECD-DAC criteria to accommodate evaluating coordination as one means of achieving a more effective humanitarian response. The evaluation approach that you develop will depend on your specific circumstances: the type of coordination being evaluated, the operational or security constraints, the available budget and other support resources, and so on.

Evaluation Approach 1: Case Study

These questions need to be slightly modified to reflect the objectives of an evaluation.

BACKGROUND

- **Background**: what situation led to the formation of the mechanism? Were there any existing mechanisms, and why were they insufficient? What were the specific reasons for forming it?
- **Alternatives**: what other mechanisms existed or now exist that provide alternative avenues for coordination? How does this mechanism relate to those alternatives?
- **Actors**: who were the primary actors that brought the group together? What roles did they take, e.g. funding, hosting, facilitating? Who were the initial members of the group?
- **Objectives**: what were the objectives of the mechanism, and who decided them? Have those objectives changed over time, and why?

GOVERNANCE

- **Governance**: what governance mechanisms exist? How are they decided (e.g. ExCom, elections)? Have these changed over time, and if so, how? How is their success judged?
- **Meetings**: what regular meetings are there, and how are they managed? How effective and useful are they, and who judges that? How are new meetings (e.g. working groups) formed?
- **Structure**: what is the structure of the group? How has that structure changed over time? How does the structure reflect (or not) the activities of the group?

ADMINISTRATION

- **Support**: what support structures exist (e.g. secretariat, security officer, etc.), if any? What are the historical and current budgets for the mechanism?
- **Cost**: how much has the mechanism cost to support over time, and how has cost-effectiveness been assessed (if at all)?
- **Funding**: who funds the mechanism (if funding is necessary)? How is that funding managed? Has the funding been consistent and, if not, how has that affected work?
- **Hosting**: who has hosted the mechanism (either meetings or support functions) and how has that hosting arrangement been managed?

MEMBERSHIP

- **Participation**: what constitutes “membership” and how is that managed? What is the quantity and quality of participation in the mechanism by the members?
- **Membership**: what is the members' composition in term of international / local, big / small, faith-based / secular NGOs? Was this composition arrived at through accident or design?
- **Discipline**: what compliance measures exist for membership criteria or codes of conduct? How are these measures enforced? Is there a member complaints mechanism in place?

EXTERNAL ROLE

- **Relationships**: who are the key actors with whom the group deals, and how does it interface
with them? What are the gaps in the relationships?

- **Role**: how does the mechanism fit into the wider humanitarian community, both in theory (i.e. strategically) and in practice (i.e. operationally)? (includes policy development)
- **Impact**: what does impact mean to the group? What has the impact of the mechanism been, and how has that impact been judged (informally) or measured (formally)?
- **Value-added**: what is the added value of the coordination mechanism to a) the group members; b) the humanitarian community; c) affected communities; d) other actors?
- **Status**: what is the current status of the group, and what are its future plans? How is it regarded by the humanitarian community? What documentation exists or is planned?

**ACTIVITIES**

- **Issues**: what are the key issues the group has dealt with or is dealing with? What are the approaches that have been taken to address these issues (e.g. working groups)?
- **Functions**: what functions does the mechanism fulfil and/or what services does it provide to members? How are those functions and services delivered?
- **Communication**: how is information passed between governing members and general members, between members generally, and between the mechanism and other actors?
- **Levels**: at what level has the mechanism operated – regionally, nationally, locally, site-specific? How have the relations between different levels been managed by the mechanism?

**LESSONS**

- **History**: what has been the broad path that the mechanism has taken? What were the critical success or failure points (e.g. funding, credibility, etc.), and how did the group manage them?
- **Learning**: are there any learning opportunities for the mechanism – retreats, evaluations, reviews? Are there any accountability measures in place, or have any been considered?
- **Success factors**: what are the factors that have lead to the success (or failure) of a) the overall coordination mechanism and b) specific initiatives the mechanism has undertaken?
- **Lessons learned**: aside from the success factors, what are the lessons that have been learned either individually (by interviewees) or collectively (by the group)?
- **Exit strategy**: is there a situation in which the mechanism would no longer serve a purpose, and has that situation been articulated explicitly by the group?
### Evaluation Approach 2: Service Delivery (Logical Framework approach)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Activity</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Possible Outputs</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Coordination meetings                         | Service               | • Frequency and type of meetings held  
• Meeting attendance levels over time  
• Value of meetings held to members | Examples of collective or individual actions taken as a result of improved coordination that demonstrate improved ownership and connectedness and/or coherent actions taken |
| Information sharing                           | Service / Products    | • Number and type of information products produced  
• Circulation levels of information products produced | Perceived value, actual use and impact of information products produced                           |
| Advocacy and production of policy positions   | Service/ Products     | • Number of advocacy points raised  
• Type and level of advocacy actions  
• Number and type of papers produced  
• Circulation levels of papers produced | Impact of advocacy actions, e.g. examples of change in policy/action                                |
| Engagement and representation with external stakeholders | Service | • Identification of Key Actors established  
• Level and consistency of access maintained | Recognition and consultation by stakeholders with NGO coordination mechanism                      |
| Security Coordination                         | Service               | • Uptake of security services by members  
• Value of security services to members | Actual or perceived reduction in security risks due to decisions/actions taken as a result of better coordination |

### Evaluation Approach 3: Adaptation of the OECD/DAC Evaluating Humanitarian Action Criteria (Systems Approach)

**Systems approach used by the European Commission’s 3 Cs (Coordination, Complementarity, Coherence)**

**Scope of evaluating NGO coordination** (adapted from EU 3 C’s):
- At different levels (international, regional, national, sub-national, and sectoral)
- Content (Policies, principles, priorities, procedures, practices/actions)
- Intensity (Consultation, co-operation, collaboration)
- With different stakeholders (national and local NGOs, other civil society, INGOs big and
small from different nations, national and local government, UN, donors, etc.).

**Guiding Principles of the Coordination Mechanism**
- Participation in, and formulation of, guiding policies and principles
- Application and relevance of guiding policies and principles to given situation
- Management financial and human resources; procedures and practices as applied and their effect

**Foundation and Work Planning of Coordination Mechanism through Problem Analysis, Objectives, Planning, and Implementation**
- Analyse the needs assessment and problem analysis that informed the foundation of the coordination mechanism and the prioritisation of its activities
- Assess the relevance of the objectives of the coordination mechanism to the contextual analysis and problem analysis particularly in light of concurrent coordination
- Analyse the following processes and their effect on activities of the coordination mechanism: (a) planning (b) implementation (c) reflection and feedback (d) expenditure.

**Application of OECD/DAC Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance (EHA) Criteria Area of Enquiry**
- Efficiency (including cost-effectiveness): Efficiency measures the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to the inputs. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether the most efficient process has been used. Cost-effectiveness looks beyond how inputs were converted into outputs, to whether different outputs could have been produced that would have had a greater impact in achieving the project purpose.
- Effectiveness (including timeliness): Effectiveness measures the extent to which the activity achieves its purpose, or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs. Implicit within the criteria of effectiveness is timeliness of the intervention.

**Sustainability, including transition or exit strategy**

**Basic questions to ask:**
- What steps did relevant actors take, individually or jointly, to improve coherence, complementarity, and/or coordination?
- Which, if any, enabling mechanisms and/or frameworks were used or put into place? And for what purpose?
- What results were achieved, intentionally or unintentionally? Why, and why not?
- What constraints or opportunities did the actors encounter while implementing their actions/mechanisms? How did they deal with these?
## Evaluation Approach 4: Cluster Evaluation II, Adapted to an NGO Coordination Mechanism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Evaluation Questions</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. To what degree has the NGO coordination mechanism modified and strengthened the humanitarian response?</td>
<td>Effectiveness (outcome)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What intentional or unintentional positive or negative effects of the NGO coordination mechanism concerning the coordination and interactions among participating organisations and the humanitarian system as a whole can be demonstrated?</td>
<td>Effects (rather than “impact”)</td>
</tr>
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<td>c. How is the NGO coordination mechanism interacting with initiatives to improve overall humanitarian performance, e.g. cluster approach, the HC system, including the HCT (or UNHCR in refugee situations). Is it implemented in the spirit of the <em>Principles for Partnership</em>?</td>
<td>Coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. To what degree has the NGO coordination mechanism achieved the intended outputs (these will vary, e.g. representation, partnership/cohesiveness, protecting humanitarian space, accountability)?</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Does the NGO coordination mechanism enable participating organisations to deliver better response through coordination and information sharing?</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Is there evidence that the output and impacts of the NGO coordination mechanism justify the inputs of stakeholders INGOs and LNGOs at the country level?</td>
<td>Efficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>