



ACBAR

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

A chance to influence the humanitarian system



Workshop Report

Humanitarian Assistance, Structures and Coordination in the Eastern Region on the 3rd of August 2010.

Organized by NHRP, ACBAR and OCHA.

The NGO and the Humanitarian Reform Project¹, in cooperation with ACBAR and OCHA invited on the 3rd of August humanitarian stakeholders in the Eastern region to a workshop on Humanitarian Assistance, Structures and Coordination in the East region covering the 4 Eastern provinces Nangahar, Laghman, Kunar and Nuristan for a day of interactive discussion to increase the humanitarian reform awareness in the region and the awareness on what recourses are available on the Kabul level in addition to the global level. The aim of the workshop was to come up with practical suggestions and recommendations on how we can improve the humanitarian response capacity in the East and best utilize the resources available. A total of 50 participants ranging from UN, INGOs, NNGOs, ARCS, ANDMA and PDMC came together and the following is a summary of their discussions and recommendations.

Outline of the workshop

The workshop was divided into two parts, the first half of the day focused on presentations and framing the discussion and for the second part of the day the participants discussed the humanitarian coordination in the East and ways for improvement;

Humanitarian assistance and humanitarian structures

- What is humanitarian assistance and how do we distinguish it from long-term development.
- The Global Humanitarian reform process- background and purpose
- The global and national humanitarian structures for coordination, funding and leadership.
- Humanitarian resources on the Kabul level.
- The role of ANDMA, PDMC, OCHA and ACBAR in the East region, an overview of the current coordination mechanisms and interactive discussion on the coordination between them.

Working group discussions;

- How do the humanitarian coordination mechanisms in the East region currently work together in the region and with the mechanisms on the Kabul level?
- How can we improve the link between the coordination in the Eastern region and the Kabul level? Do we need to improve the link?
- What practical suggestions would the group wish to make to improve the humanitarian response capacity in the East and how can the Kabul level be utilized for that?

Humanitarian coordination in the East

The humanitarian coordination in the east is in no sense lacking in established structures. It is the expressed opinion of the humanitarian stakeholders in the region that the coordination is working well and gaps are covered and duplication avoided. The HRT is established and ACBAR together with the

¹ NGOs and Humanitarian Reform is a 3 year NGO consortium project funded by DfID. Member agencies in Afghanistan are ActionAid, Afghanaid, CAFOD represented by Caritas Germany, Care International, ICVA, Oxfam, NRC and Save the Children

line-departments runs a number of technical working groups which fulfill the function of the Provincial Developmental sectoral groups excluding the participation of PRTs and private contractors. Yet it needs to be kept in mind that the majority of the coordination takes place in Jalalabad and the connection to the 3 other provinces is weaker, especially for Nuristan where information, response and coordination is severely lacking. In addition there is an Advocacy working group, a civ/mil working group and general NGO meetings which take place regularly. Due to the security situation there are few expats working in the region and there seems to be a contradiction in the perception of Afghan staff and expats in how well the coordination is working, expats find it lacking compared to other contexts and Afghan staff experience it as very well functioning. Most likely the truth lies in the middle and it is the perception of the participants in the workshop (no expats participated) that they certainly can improve even further within the region and increase their response capacity but also in particular there was consensus on the need to improve the interaction with the Kabul level mechanisms.

Participant recommendations

The working group discussions were focused and the results of the recommendations were surprisingly identical among the groups. Each group listed the same basic priorities and recommendations for improving the humanitarian response capacity in the region, the following are their main recommendations;

- Despite having established a relatively extensive coordination structure in the East all the participants expressed the need for all the clusters to be established in the region and not only in the region but in the provinces as well. The Protection and WASH clusters are already established in the region and the experiences have so far been very positive in improved coordination within the sectors. In addition they wish for the regional clusters to play a greater part in ERF allocations with proposals first being technically reviewed in the regional clusters according to the regional priorities. The participants also wish for Gender issues to play a major cross-cutting part in all the clusters. While summing up the working group recommendations there was recognition that if the clusters are to be established there needs to be a review of the existing mechanisms as to not overburden people with meetings and duplicate coordination efforts. There was recognition that the region is not sufficiently linked in with the Kabul level mechanisms and that an establishment of the clusters might make the humanitarian response and coordination more stream-lined and the region can benefit from the capacity resources that exists within the clusters.
- To improve humanitarian response capacity the participants feel the need for increased pre-positioning of supplies and emergency funding on both a regional and provincial basis.
- The capacity of ANDMA needs to greatly improve; like in other regions the ANDMA offices lack trained staff, logistics capacity, transport, communications and resources in general. Besides the lack of capacity on the ground the coordination and communication between the provincial ANDMA levels and ANDMA Kabul needs to improve. In addition the participants feel that the PDMC structure is in great need of capacity building of its department representatives.
- Participants all agreed that there is a need to develop common tools for rapid assessments amongst the humanitarian stakeholders and agree on which criteria to use while assessing emergency needs. Inconsistent data between organizations is a great problem delaying humanitarian response. Participants complained of slow response from the Kabul level in meeting their supply needs but also recognized that due to their faulty data it at times is difficult for the Kabul level to respond in an accountable manner.
- Participants expressed a need for OCHA and UNAMA to clarify their role as coordination bodies and finalize conflicting responsibilities which remains after the OCHA establishment.
- Last but not least there was a clear request for capacity building initiatives among the humanitarian community on issues such as a principled approach, civ/mil, assessments and community involvement in programming. Participants expressed the need for more workshops and trainings to be held in the region creating the opportunity to bring the humanitarian community together and increase their awareness and response quality.

NHRP recommendations

As the NHRP has had the opportunity to observe the participant discussions and previously do a short coordination assessment in the region we take the opportunity to put forward a few additional recommendations;

- It is very refreshing to hear that the humanitarian stakeholders in the East feel that they have good communication and the capacity to respond to needs. The NHRP would however wish to emphasize the regional aspect of the coordination; security is a serious constraint in the area which of course leads to the focus being on accessible areas, yet the humanitarian needs tend to be the greatest where access is the least such as in Nuristan. A common dialogue amongst the humanitarian community on what can be collectively done to address the needs, both ongoing and emergency could open up some windows of opportunity.
- The NHRP would wish to emphasize the participants expression for capacity building, the Afghan staff are doing fantastic work in the region but the lack of expat presence reduces the opportunity for sharing different perspectives and maintaining an ongoing humanitarian dialogue on values and principles and how upholding these can help us support communities in need.
- Should the participants go ahead with choosing the cluster system as their main form of humanitarian coordination it needs to be really clear that the cluster is not an external mechanism which will come in and sort out all problems, the regional and provincial clusters will only be as good and the participants make them in terms of their commitment. A first step might be to identify clear and commonly known cluster focal points in the region and the provinces and link them to the technical working group meetings in Jalalabad as a regional hub and maintain a regular communication with the respective cluster in Kabul. Since the technical WGs do not include the participation of PRTs etc they can be utilized as a humanitarian venue as well. If it would be possible for the potential provincial and regional focal points to undergo more extensive cluster coordination training by the Kabul clusters it could be very useful for the communication both within the region and between the region and Kabul level.

Lastly, the participants did not decide on how to take their recommendations forward. The NHRP would suggest the HRT to have a discussion on the workshop report and decide on a plan of action for furthering the recommendations, since ANDMA and the provincial PDMCs are not a part of the HRT it is important to somehow also include them in the follow-up.

The NHRP on behalf of the organizers would like to thank all participants for their active participation, especially to those who traveled far to attend and we wish you the best of luck with implementing your recommendations. This workshop is only one step among many to better addressing the needs of the population in the West and the intention and the willingness for achieving that has certainly been displayed in this event.

For questions or comments please contact:

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List of participants *(contacts can be obtained from OCHA or ACBAR):*

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