Challenges

One of the key challenges to coordinated security measures is resolving the disputes around who should be party to them. For example, in some instances OCHA has been excluded from field-level security management teams by other members of the UN Country Team. Such exclusive habits are not conducive to coordination, whether on security or other matters.

These exclusive habits are also a point of contention with NGOs. NGOs may have different thresholds for evacuation and the UN might pull out when others remain. Yet how this is done is crucial. For example, in Burundi in 1999, in addition to their withdrawal, UN agencies withdrew the radios that they had been providing to NGOs. Such action can fatally undermine any sense of community and collegiality. The IASC Security Task Force, due to finish its work in mid-2001, will hopefully address some of these UN–NGO tensions.

5.2.2 Logistics

All the evidence for this study suggests coordination structures that provide or facilitate access to logistics support are almost invariably valued. This was the foundation for the valued role of the Coordinator in East Timor in matching available logistics resources with needs, and supporting WFP's vital logistics role. In the DRC, OCHA's role in hiring planes to facilitate the response to crisis in Kisangani was also much appreciated. It was also at the heart of a highly collaborative relationship between WFP and UNHCR in the Great Lakes in 1996, when they temporarily pooled personnel and equipment in Movement Control Centres (MOVCONs).[95]

Although the IASC has endorsed WFP's role in providing logistics, individual agencies retain the prerogative to make their own arrangements.[96] However, the current IASC initiative to create an inter-agency capacity for activating a United Nations Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC) at the onset of a large-scale emergency is a sign of inter-agency enthusiasm for joint approaches on this matter. The UNJLC proposal – being coordinated by WFP – builds on the efforts to create a UNJLC during the Eastern Zaire crisis in 1996, the Somalia/Kenya flooding in 1998, the Kosovo operation, East Timor in 1999, and the flooding in Mozambique in 2000. The plan is to establish a UNJLC – matched to the demand of the situation – within the 'operational structure' of the Humanitarian Coordinator, to which agencies might second staff. WFP is working on the required 'flyaway' packages required to have UNJLC capability readily available.

Important elements of logistics coordination include:

- The willingness of agencies or Coordinators to put resources and capabilities at the service of others.
- An agreed sets of procedures for joint logistics operations.

Challenges

As with other coordination services, the key to usefulness of joint logistics arrangements is that they add value. In the words of one UN agency: 'Having central services is fine provided they are fast enough.' Where common services are significantly slower than agencies' own arrangements, their attractiveness diminishes. This will also be the challenge for the proposed UNJLCs.

5.2.3 Additional Common Services

Besides assistance in security and logistics, there were a number of other useful services provided by coordination structures mentioned in interviews and studies. One interviewee captured this quid pro quo element of coordination, highlighting how valuable such services are where Coordinators have to forge consensus among agencies: 'If you can put up VHF communications, you'll be given a whole lot more information.'

There was little mention of common houses and offices, although this has come up in past studies.[97]

[95] UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP (1998) op. cit.
[96] IASC (1998b) 'Pamphlet on Humanitarian Coordinators Annex III', November.
[97] UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP (1998) op. cit., p.14.

Evidence suggested that additional useful services include:
- Common communication facilities such as those provided between 1994 and 1996 by UNHCR in the Goma camps, and the Radio Room in Rwanda 1994. By contrast in 2000 in the DRC, many NGOs and the Red Cross were frustrated by the absence of a shared communication system.
- Facilitating visas and laissez-passer.
- Providing pigeonholes, meeting space, GIS/database and mapping services, NGO liaison, and a front desk service. The HCIC in Kosovo is a good example here.
- Helping new UN and NGOs acclimatise through induction services (although this is partly to compensate for the poor levels of preparation and induction of new staff before they arrive in the field).
- Providing training sessions, for example, in the DRC, OCHA organised training sessions on food security and flood response that NGOs found useful.

5.2.4 Resource Mobilisation

Although preoccupation with funding was never far below the surface in many interviews, there was very little said by interviewees about the role of field-level coordination in mobilising resources. However, if decentralisation of funding decisions emerges as an enduring trend among donors, this could change. Indeed, the team encountered a number of examples of field-level Coordinators involved in resource mobilisation. In Kosovo, the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA worked to mobilise funding for 2000/2001 winter preparedness activities. The Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia was engaged in regular and sustained advocacy at local and international levels on Somalia's needs and the proposed responses to support the Somali people. In the DRC, many interviewees spoke of the importance of a recent donor conference for which OCHA had prepared a paper on behalf of the UN Country Team and the humanitarian community.

On the basis of the evidence before the team, resource mobilisation is done well where:
- The Coordinator does not have responsibility for a particular agency's operations; this helps avoid conflict of interest. In Angola, the involvement of UCAH in demobilisation led to some seeing UCAH as a competitor for resources rather than an impartial fundraiser.
- Efforts are prepared jointly. For example, in Burundi the humanitarian community came together to create a reconstruction plan that was discussed at a Brussels pledging conference on 6 December 2000.
- Where analysis of the causes and consequences of humanitarian suffering are clearly presented along with clear proposals for international action.
- Agencies on the ground engage donors at local and international level.
- Where efforts are directed at common funds and system-wide responses rather than agency interests.

5.2.5 Information (gathering, analysis, synthesis and dissemination)

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. Timely and effective response to humanitarian emergencies depends on accurate information about needs. Information also underpins analysis, the value of which has already been discussed.

A common theme among interviewees 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. This was one of the stated strengths of the HCIC in Kosovo and the Integrated Operations Centre of UNREO in Rwanda in 1994, and one of the striking weaknesses of information exchange in the DRC where some UN agencies were resistant to sharing information with NGOs. It is also crucial that consolidated information is distributed widely, particularly to those that provided it. The team received frequent complaints, particularly from international NGOs, that information provided *'disappeared into a black hole and was never seen again'*.

Key elements of useful information provision include:

- Maps, graphs and matrixes of who is doing what, where, as well as where local needs are. This was the most cited source of useful information for programme planning. This sort of information is therefore essential for a Coordinator to have in his/her toolkit. However, the degree of sophistication of this information may differ between what is useful for decision-making and what is useful for reporting. In Burundi and Angola, mapping the whereabouts of IDPs gave practitioners a bigger picture as well as the basis for an advocacy tool to be used with the donors; it also built the credibility and influence of the Coordinator.

- Data on population needs that is disaggregated by sex and age to identify the specific needs of women, men, children and the elderly.

- Up-to-date directories of contacts. For example, a directory of humanitarian and development contacts has been drawn up by OCHA Georgia.

- Translation of the local press was described as useful in Indonesia. This is also key in security planning.

- Archive materials, for example, background documents on particular geographic areas, are also helpful. Several interviewees suggested this was a neglected but important source of information.

- Information on food security strategies at household and regional level provided by the Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU) for Somalia enabled WFP to better target its assistance. Established in 1994, the FSAU now has monitors across Somalia to provide information on the agricultural and food availability situation in the country.

- Geographic information systems (GIS) are powerful tools for tracking needs and the impact of action plans. The HCIC in Kosovo produced an atlas available publicly on their website, on CD-ROMs, and in hard copy.[98]

- Data on donors' policies and funding.

- Pigeonholes and mailboxes allow easy dissemination of information for agencies in close geographical proximity to one another. This can be complemented by websites and CD ROMs where this is not the case. Interviewees said this facilitates communication with headquarters.

- Agency handbooks and key documents available on CD ROMS that are regularly updated.

- The Integrated Regional Information Network's (IRINs) ability to provide a short synthesis of regional activities, trends and events was universally welcomed.

Challenges

National and local authorities have a key role to play in gathering and providing information on the needs of the population and are an important source on which humanitarian agencies can draw. One of the challenges is to build the capacity of such national and local authorities where they exist.[99]

Minimising the duplication in data gathering and maximising its accessibility to potential users is also crucial. This was one of the major challenges described in Somalia. For instance, UNICEF has some of the best data on the socioeconomic situation across the country but this is used for its own purposes. In the same vein, when the UN Development Office for Somalia disbanded in 1999 few knew that it had been collecting data for five to six years; the information was not well-archived and therefore difficult to retrieve.

One of the challenges that accompany new information technology tools is having staff available to operate them. This was a particular problem that beset the Health Information System (HIS) project for Somalia. After five years, the system is not up and running. Although data exists, it has not been input effectively. The project has also suffered from lack of funding and leadership. In the field, although agency staff are keen to use the HIS, the lack of training on the incipient system is a source of frustration.

In many settings, Coordinators have to solve the problem of how to gather and disseminate politically sensitive information and analysis. The solution of NGOs in the DRC was to hold small, informal gatherings which brought Congolese and international staff together to share information and analysis on the political and military situation. Participating agencies felt this was invaluable.

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[98] HCIC combined GIS data produced by such sources as the Western European Satellite Centre, the Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Demining, KFOR, the Yugoslav Institute of Statistics, and the International Management Group.
[99] This recurs as a recommendation of the Special Coordinator on Internal Displacement.

What emerges from all this is the challenge of finding staff who have specific skills in filtering, analysing, synthesising and presenting information. A good example of this is IRIN, which relies on teams that include professional journalists who are used to digesting a large volume of material alongside humanitarian workers who maintain the humanitarian perspective and angle of IRIN's work. A further challenge is ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of staff on a coordination team to meet information needs. When humanitarian actors have limited commitment or capability to share information, coordination structures have to be more proactive in information gathering.

Overall, for all the emphasis placed on information, the study team came away with a sense that there is rarely discussion of what kind of information people need to make good decisions, and little discussion between providers and consumers about what is wanted. As a result, those given responsibilities to compile information have to work this out for themselves, so reinventing the wheel. One interviewee summed this up: *'I am fed up with the little initiatives on information here and there. What do we want to collect and for what?'*[100] The challenge is to secure system-wide agreement on guidelines for basic data collection and dissemination.

5.1.9 Meetings

Meetings are the most obvious tool by which information is gathered and shared. Meetings are also useful for team building, problem solving and building networks.

In the DRC, many NGO interviewees lamented that UN-convened meetings did not provide real opportunity to analyse the situation or share lessons. However, NGOs in particular stressed that in Kinshasa, OCHA-convened meetings offered useful networking opportunities. For Somalia, although many value the SACB for bringing people together, many interviewees stressed the importance of transparency and honesty from participants, implying that this is currently lacking.

Factors that determine the usefulness of meetings include:
- **Inclusive composition**: UN Country Team meetings that include all IASC members was cited as a strong point of coordination in Belgrade for FRY, excluding Kosovo. In the DRC and Somalia, exclusion of local or international NGOs from key meetings was a sore point for some interviewees.
- **The comportment of participants**: Commitment, transparency, and respectfulness from all participants is required. The team was struck that few meetings included introductions.
- **Good preparation and minuting**: Objectives and outcomes should be defined.[101]
- **Sensitivity to translation requirements**: In several meetings attended by the team, there was little sensitivity towards those participants who were working in a second or third language, and their possible translation needs.
- **Effective follow up**: The degree of follow up outside meetings can depend on resources. For Somalia, the SACB Secretariat argued that its own limited capacity impaired follow up on decisions. Perhaps the most critical case was an agreement to strengthen coordination in the field that had simply slipped out of sight through lack of follow up.
- **Skilful and sensitive chairing that can balance consultation and action**: UN Country Team meetings in Belgrade demonstrated how effective chairs can 'keep the ball rolling.' Effective chairs can also use meetings as an accountability mechanism, using the public arena to remind others of prior commitments in meetings, mandates or MoUs. This role was played to good effect by the Health Coordinator in the SACB.
- **Making regular checks on the composition and frequency of the meeting**: This will need to be done in order to ensure that composition and frequency are still appropriate, as the context of the humanitarian response changes. Otherwise meetings will suffer from dwindling attendance and/or attendance by decreasingly less senior personnel.

Challenges
Participation is a vexing question. Those coordination structures that mirror IASC membership – including UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement – still exclude donors and local NGOs. East Timor, the DRC and Somalia are all examples where the exclusion of local NGOs – whether for reasons of security or translation – has proved contentious.[102]

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[100] This will be challenges for the Geographic Information Systems Team (GIST) and the Structured Humanitarian Assistance Reporting (SHARE) initiative, both inter-agency information management initiatives.
[101] The Handbooks of UNHCR and UNDAC handbook provide useful tips on effective meetings.

The question of donor participation is also a thorny one. For instance, in the Somalia case study, interviewees argued that donors are central to the SACB. However, while some interviewees argued that donors' involvement in meetings acts as a compliance mechanism and ensures that plans are implemented, others suggested that donor presence encouraged grandstanding, and that it risked politicisation of humanitarian decisions.

Political sensitivities and security concerns affect participation and also agendas. In the eastern DRC, for example, the participation of politically partisan local NGOs in information sharing meetings has inhibited open communication. In Kinshasa, to demonstrate their impartiality and neutrality, agencies have to be sure that no political information is shared at public meetings or in minutes or bulletins for fear of provoking the government's suspicions.

The challenge to ensure that there is an optimal level of structured interaction and that the right number of meetings takes place is a challenge that is emblematic of coordination in general. Regular, well-run meetings that stick to a set format and meet felt needs of the participants to share information and agree actions are valuable. Yet meetings that are convened for the sake of it are not. For instance, in the Somalia case, it seemed that the regime of meetings in Nairobi proceed with minimal apparent regard for the impact of such activity on the ground. However, in Baidoa, prior to the deployment of a UNCU field coordination officer in December 2000, the lack of systematic exchange between agencies on issues that affected them all appeared to risk duplication and gaps in response, as well as increasing security risks as a result of varying interactions with local communities.

5.3 Tools and Structures

5.3.1 The Consolidated Appeals Process

Since its inception in 1992, there have been continuous efforts to improve the CAP as a process and as a tool. There is evidence of increasing engagement by donors and others in using the CAP as a strategic coordination tool. However, on the basis of the evidence gathered by the study team it is clear there is still little uniformity in how this is done, what or whom it includes, and how it is used. Indeed, the impression from interviewees was that the CAP remains largely a public relations exercise that produces little integrated planning or prioritisation and gives donors the freedom to cherry pick or ignore it. This despite the fact that, globally, the CAP provides one of the only tools that enables comparison of international responses to humanitarian need and is therefore potentially very useful.

In the DRC, views were overwhelmingly negative. NGOs were not aware of having been asked to participate. Many people commented that there was no substantive consultative process behind the document; neither could anyone give a clear view of how the CAP related to planning commissions that had been established in North and South Kivu. In Somalia the key tensions surrounded getting buy-in from the donors and NGOs in the SACB for a UN process and tool. More positively, in Kosovo, as the CAP was a regional one for South East Europe, it provided one of the few fora for inter-agency discussion at the regional level.

However, it is not clear to participants that regional CAPs always add value, particularly given the opportunity costs in their formulation. For example, experience in preparing the CAP for the Great Lakes region was complicated by five agencies defining regions differently.

At its worst, preparing the CAP is more oriented to estimating likely donor response than reliable assessment of humanitarian need. One interviewee summed up the widely-held view among the rest: *'CAP is a major distraction from the real work. It is donor driven and you write down what you think donors want to hear. It doesn't reflect reality and doesn't necessarily secure financing.'* UN agencies appear to go through the motions to please the donors. NGO participation varies.

Donors too show a mixed response. Some argue that the CAP has little relevance to their funding decisions. However, others have used the CAP as a framework for planning, as a reference point for dialogue with other actors, as a factor in their funding decisions, or as a decisive trigger for the allocation of resources.[103]

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[102] At the time of the study, the NGO Consultative Committee for Somalia in Nairobi was strengthening local NGO involvement by restructuring its Steering Committee from an ad hoc grouping of international NGO representatives to include one local and one international NGO from each district in Somalia.

[103] See the Common Observations of the First Donor Retreat on the CAP, Montreux, Switzerland.

Although it is not clear to what extent the quality of the analysis and programmes in the CAP is a key determinant of its success as a fundraising tool, the study team concluded that the CAP could add value to the humanitarian effort by placing greater emphasis on the process of analysis and planning. As one interviewee pointed out: 'The good thing about the CAP is that it forces agencies to sit and conceptualise together through joint assessment and then mapping out the strategy.'

The CAP could therefore provide an opportunity to do three things currently neglected in many coordination structures and settings: (i) engage in analysis of the environment, essential for security and strategy setting, (ii) gather information about how the aid effort is impacting on the situation positively or negatively, and (iii) be the basis of inter-agency advocacy on the plight of people in any given situation. For this to happen, the CAP process needs to become an effective forum for overworked field workers to analyse and plan in way that is clearly beneficial to them. OCHA could play an important role in providing inputs of analysis to stimulate thought and debate.

This study suggests measures to make the CAP more effective include:
- Make the exercise more evidently useful to field staff as an opportunity for them to analyse and plan. As one interviewee said 'It does make the UN talk to each other which is no bad thing, but it is negative [in] that it gets people to come from headquarters rather than the field.'
- Ensure that the process is supported by effective facilitation and analysis so that participants feel the process adds value to their work.
- Require Coordinators to actively seek NGO and Red Cross Movement involvement in the analysis process, if not the fundraising strategy. The credibility of the plan and the degree to which NGOs want to be associated with the UN are two factors that will determine NGO interest in the CAP document as a fundraising strategy. UN political and military actors and analysts should also be involved in the analysis and strategy-setting process, if not the strategy.
- Turn the CAP into a valuable opportunity for planning operational response and advocacy strategies (beyond the increasingly elaborate efforts around the CAP launch).
- Improve the accuracy and transparency of the CAP's assessment of target beneficiaries in order to increase its use as an advocacy tool for assessing and comparing international responses to humanitarian need.[104]
- Encourage the UN system to give greater authority and legitimacy to a neutral Coordinator to better enable him/her to facilitate and ultimately perform prioritisation.

5.3.2 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)

Past studies and interviewees pointed to the value of MoUs to counter the tendency to leave UN Country Teams and individuals to reinvent the wheel and negotiate new relationships at field level. At a minimum, they indicate a predisposition towards collaboration.[105] They can also serve as a useful accountability tool.

Interviewees were divided on the level of detail that is helpful in an MoU. Some suggested that 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. Judging from the documents from the IASC and ECHA regarding divisions of labour on IDPs and ECHA respectively, these processes fall into the latter camp: in a time-honoured formula, all the difficult decisions about divisions of labour have been devolved to task forces in the field.

If MoUs are to be useful, it is critical that Coordinators and their staff are aware of all the relevant MoUs, their contents, and their responsibility to honour them. This in turn depends on effective induction and briefing of new staff, as well as effective dissemination to existing staff. One interviewee suggested that OCHA field units keep and provide all MoUs as a service.

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[104] For discussion of the challenges of assessing needs and recommendations and agreeing shared assessment methodologies among IASC members see Ockwell, R. (1999) 'Full Report of the Thematic Evaluation of Recurring Challenges in the Provision of Food Assistance in Complex Emergencies' (Office of Evaluation, World Food Programme).
[105] For example, IASC Post-Conflict Reintegration Report; also WFP, UNHCR Tripartite report, op. cit.

5.3.3 Sectoral Coordination

As this study's ToR suggest, sectoral coordination is a critical aspect of coordination. As one NGO termed it, *'Humanitarian coordination is based on the foundation of sectoral coordination'*. This foundation can be a strong one. By its nature, the focus of sectoral coordination is narrowly defined which offers greater clarity about what needs to be done. Coordination responsibilities are frequently allocated on the basis of technical skills or mandates. Participants often share technical skills, which focuses debates and decisions around technical matters. Greater proximity to the beneficiaries also focuses efforts.

That said, coordination at the sectoral level is not immune to some of the difficulties encountered in coordination in general. Sectoral coordination can impose burdens that outweigh its benefits, for instance, when the number of coordination bodies proliferates, and individuals and agencies with coordination and operational responsibilities find themselves struggling with double workloads. As one UN interviewee commented, *'Sectoral coordination can help focus things by focusing on specific details. But it can become doing nothing other than coordination.'*

Furthermore, allocating coordination responsibilities can prove contentious even at sectoral level, particularly when no agency – whether the UN or otherwise – has clear technical expertise or mandated responsibility for a sector. Allocating responsibility for shelter in the early days of the response in East Timor is a case in point. In both east and west DRC, the already ad hoc efforts of coordination in several sectors have been hampered by disputes between agencies about coordination and implementation responsibilities. A staff member of one of these agencies described themselves at being *'at war'* with another UN agency.

Both donors and agencies can resist Coordinators' efforts to allocate sectoral responsibilities. There should be more work at central level to build in more predictability around allocating sectoral responsibilities in order to relieve Coordinators from having to reinvent the wheel at every turn.

Sectoral coordination works well where:
- Strategies at the sectoral level are linked to fulfilling the overall strategy guiding the response. Sectoral coordination is weakened by the absence of clear goals for the overall humanitarian response and the sector.
- Full-time Coordinators are appointed at the sectoral level who are technically competent, for example, UNHCR's appointment of high-calibre technical Coordinators in the health, water, food, site planning, logistics, security, communications and community services sectors in all its sub-offices in the Great Lakes in 1994.[106]
- Coordinators are prepared to 'shame and blame' others into upholding their undertakings, thereby acting as a monitoring and enforcement mechanism. This was true of the health sectoral committee of the SACB. The UNMIK Mine Action Coordination Centre in Pristina is also an example where tight coordination was exerted, with good collaboration from donors.
- It is supported by field units that collect and disseminate information, advise on strategies, and act as focal points where thoughts on the issue can circulate. For example, FAO's field units, now present in 17 countries.[107]
- It does not preclude focus on cross-cutting issues such as human rights or protection – a criticism that interviewees levelled at coordination in the early days of the East Timor response in 1999. Several interviewees suggested that complementing sectoral coordination with provincial or regional focal points would support this.

5.3.4 Regional Coordination

In all three case studies, interviewees repeatedly stressed the importance of 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.'* Many interviewees spoke of the value of having a regional perspective on the causes and consequences of conflict and humanitarian suffering.

[106] Borton. J. (1996) op cit.
[107] The seed money that has been provided by OCHA for some of these units e.g. in Timor and Mozambique, was welcomed

In the DRC, the regional structures of some agencies have, on occasion, compensated for weak support from headquarters and have offered invaluable logistics or administrative support. Yet on other occasions, these same structures have duplicated efforts or requirements from headquarters. There was even stronger criticism of some regional offices for engaging in analysis of belligerents' strategies without full awareness of the potential dangers this posed for UN colleagues in the country itself.

The UNCU for Somalia has focused on strengthening regional connections, particularly with Kenya and Ethiopia, which has led to the adoption of a regional security plan and increased information sharing. A regional exercise to stimulate pastoral networks has also been hugely beneficial for all participants. Both these positive examples highlight the added value of regional analysis and strategy.

In relation to Kosovo, there appeared to be considerable cross-border coordination over the sensitive Presovo region in Southern Serbia, particularly between the Humanitarian Coordinators in Pristina and Belgrade. The fact that both Humanitarian Coordinators had regional envoy roles within their respective organisations also fostered regional perspectives. However, it was not clear whether there were adequate coordination structures in place in order to build and maintain a comprehensive regional analysis.

Inevitably, the recurring theme in discussion of regional coordination is how do Coordinators and structures at regional level relate to Coordinators and coordination structures in the countries within that region.[108] It is not clear that additional Coordinators present the optimum model for to achieving regional coordination. For example, the designation of a Regional Coordinator for the Horn of Africa was criticised by a number of people, notwithstanding the calibre of the candidate in the job. The position was described as an ad hoc structure that was devised with little concern for how it would relate to other Coordinators in the region; it was perceived to be responsible for retarding incipient attempts at regional coordination initiated by Coordinators across the region.

Many argued that regional coordination can be best achieved by country coordination structures coming together on a regular basis and establishing a flow of information and analysis between them. This is supported by OCHA's experience in the Great Lakes, where its efforts to bring Humanitarian Affairs Officers together every three months received high praise. This practice is supported by recommendations in the IASC's Reference Group on Post-Conflict Reintegration.[109]

For regional coordination to be successful, there needs to be:

- Clarity in the division of labour and reporting lines among Coordinators.
- Structures that offer a regional overview for the benefit of those in country, and facilitate analysis at the regional level.
- Skilled and experienced Regional Coordinators who provide leadership and advice to Coordinators at country level. The negotiation of access in the DRC, and facilitation of an inter-agency position on regroupement in Burundi, were both cited as hugely valuable contributions by the Great Lakes Regional Coordinator in 1996/7.
- Complementarity between the tasks performed by Regional Coordinators and Coordinators at country level.
- Strong collaboration between all Coordinators in a region. In Rwanda in 1994 during the refugee outflux, separation of coordination jurisdictions between 'inside' and 'outside' Rwanda was described as 'perhaps the greatest weakness of the coordination arrangements'.[110]
- Adequate funding to bring people together regularly at regional level.

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[108] See Duffield, Jones & Lautze (1998) on the strains between country and regional coordinators.
[109] In its Final Report of 14 August 2000, it recommends regional approaches by conducting UN Country Team field visits across borders to refugee camps, organising regional meetings and the support of headquarters 'to ensure that regional initiatives are not thwarted by bureaucratic or mandate obstacles.' See IASC (2000) op.cit.
[110] See Borton, J. (1996) op. cit.

5.3.5 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee

The IASC is the mechanism through which field structures are put in place. Its broad membership – that is, its inclusion of NGOs and the Red Cross Movement – is seen as its most important feature. It is widely praised for providing a forum for regular inter-agency interaction which, according to some, has fostered collaborative spirit. Yet this broad membership is also the subject of criticism, reflecting the ambivalence that characterises much discussion of the IASC. Although participants cite improvements in the IASC over time, frustrations remain.

It seems that within the IASC there is a preoccupation with inclusion rather than representation. Several interviewees remarked that '*Nobody wants to be left out.*' In a body that relies on consensus, decision-making is protracted and difficult issues get dodged. One reason for this is that all participants report to different boards, resulting in weak buy-in and accountability. Yet it cannot be helped by the organisation of the agenda of meetings: participants still express concerns that the meeting agendas are overloaded and issues are not effectively clustered together. As a result, much of the substantive work gets done in the corridors rather than at the meetings.

Although the Secretary-General's proposal to establish an IASC steering committee – in order to achieve a more dynamic and focused body – was formally rejected by the IASC, a *de facto* steering group has emerged through the informal but regular consultations among the heads of OCHA, UNCHR, UNICEF and WFP. (Hitherto, this was one of the all too rare all female groupings in the UN.) Although this is said to be effective by some of those included in it, it excludes those that are said to make the IASC unique – that is, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement.

All of this has a direct bearing on decision-making over decisions about field coordination structures. Such decisions appear to be characterised by protracted discussion and debate among UN agencies, much of it taking place outside the IASC meetings and thus minimising the role of non-UN members in agreeing such arrangements. 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. As Resident Coordinators are increasingly designated through the UN Development Group (UNDG), the emphasis on the combined Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator model further intensifies the exclusion of non-UN members of the IASC on humanitarian coordination decisions. Where Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators are also being designated SRSG – such as in Sierra Leone – and the Humanitarian Coordinator is thus also responsible for the political and military strategy of the UN, this exclusion is perhaps all the more significant (see Section 6 for discussion of the problematic aspects of this).

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 coordination difficulties on the ground. (On this point, the team was struck by the size and seniority of the Inter-Agency Mission that visited the DRC in December 2000 in order to resolve coordination difficulties. However, this did not appear to be part of a systematic process of monitoring of all humanitarian coordination structures and making any necessary changes.)

Significantly, in the field there is little awareness of the IASC's role or sense that the field can make claims on the time of the IASC. Although Humanitarian Coordinators may be invited to attend the IASC when their countries are being discussed, the process of formulating a policy on regroupement in Burundi was one of the rare occasions where IASC-wide policy was generated in the field and only afterwards sent to New York.

It is apparent that much could be done to improve communication in both directions. The IASC needs to improve its monitoring. Humanitarian Coordinators and their teams have a key role to play in ensuring more systematic dissemination and implementation of key IASC initiatives and statements, as well as feeding back to the appropriate part of the IASC on key issues which need debate and a policy view. Ensuring that the IASC is systematically replicated at the field level – a point that has been recommended many times but still does not always happen – is another aspect to this.

However, studies and interviewees alike perceived the potential of the IASC.[111] 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?' Yet, as discussed above and below, advocacy, and OCHA's role in it leaves much room for improvement. Given the advocacy experience and expertise that resides among non-UN members of the IASC, measures that minimise their role in the IASC further jeopardise the IASC's potential influence and impact.

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

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

5.4 Conclusion

This section has set out some of the tasks, services and structures that are seen as useful for coordination, as well as some of those that have been less successful. Some of the tasks and services that are most valued are among the weakest aspects of current coordination. It is also notable that they are also the tasks that are essential to facilitate integrated responses to needs for humanitarian assistance and protection, that is analysis, devising strategies with clear goals and standards for the response, advocacy – including negotiating access and sustaining a framework of consent – and monitoring and evaluating impact.

Improving the provision of services will be critical to improving the ability of coordination teams to persuade others that coordination adds value. Improving the ability of coordination teams to perform the integrating tasks is critical to improve the quality and impact of humanitarian response.

The elements above offer suggestions for what should be part of a standard package for coordination provided for the benefit of humanitarian actors. However, while it is essential that such functions are more consistently provided and performed to a high standard, complex emergencies by their definition preclude a one-size-fits-all policy. The essential task of improving the capacity of the UN to supply coordination must include awareness and analysis of the differing demands for coordination that different crises pose. Thus the 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.

Debating and agreeing this package is important. OCHA, in close discussion with IASC members, should draw together the lessons from this study 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.

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[111] For example, see Duffield, Jones & Lautze (1998) op. cit.