6: LIAISING WITH MILITARY AND POLITICAL ACTORS

The preceding chapters have focused on presenting findings on coordination between humanitarian actors. This section focuses on the interface between humanitarian actors and political and military actors and strategies. The study's ToR asked whether, in different instances, the relationship between humanitarian, development, political and military actors is seen to be coherent and mutually reinforcing. The team took the decision to focus on military and political actors rather than relief and development linkages, as this remains the focus of ongoing research by the IASC.[112]

As noted in Section 2, the interface between humanitarian actors and political and military strategies has a huge impact on the conduct of humanitarian action. The scope of this study prohibits detailed discussion of the various facets of these interactions. Rather, this section focuses on the tensions within the UN around some of the interrelationships of its constituent parts.

6.1 The Drive for Coherence and the View from the Ground

It is instructive that this study's ToR asked about the coherence between political, military and humanitarian actors. On the one hand, key political players in and around the UN are pushing for humanitarian aid to be coherent with political and military aims. It is hard to pin down a precise definition of this coherence, however. The term is variously used to mean that all aspects of UN policy should serve the same goals, that humanitarians should contribute to political goals, that political actors should not leave humanitarians in a policy vacuum, and that implementing multifaceted strategies in complex settings should not be confounded by bureaucratic divisions. The drive towards integration of all elements of the UN's action in a particular country into one coherent strategy can be traced back to the document, 'An Agenda for Peace', and is reflected in the logic behind the Secretary-General's Secretariat reforms.[113]

On the other hand, all three case studies offered powerful examples of the necessity for UN agencies in particular and humanitarian agencies in general to demonstrate their independence from the contentious political strategies of the UN. The message that came loud and clear from interviewees was that to achieve any respect for humanitarian principles and action, humanitarian actors have to continually demonstrate their independence from political and military strategies and action, whether of belligerents, UN Member States, national and regional militaries, or UN peace operations. How this is maintained is a matter of ingenuity. As one interviewee commented: '*It is art not science on the ground.*'

Yet the nature of the political and military strategies and how beneficiaries and belligerents see them is perhaps the key determinant for how humanitarians positions themselves.[114] Interviewees stressed that separation on the ground is not always necessary, or possible. The nature of the context affects the relationship. Whether or not peace operations are mandated under Chapter Six or Seven of the UN Charter (with the critical distinguishing element of consent) is one factor in the complex calculation that humanitarians have to make in terms of how to relate to UN political and military strategies. Interviewees and studies argued that association with the military might be necessary for security or access.[115] Others suggested that where there is a clear shift from war to peace, humanitarians might retain distance during war and cooperate more closely after that. Yet in all instances, it remains essential that humanitarian action retains its independence.

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[112] See Kent, R. (1999) Bridging the Gap: A Report on Behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Post-Conflict Re-Integration. (UNDP).

[113] For a full discussion of the genesis, development and implications of coherence, see Macrae, J. & Leader, N. (2000) *Shifting Sands: the search for 'coherence' between political and humanitarian responses to complex emergencies* (ODI: London), HPG Report 8.

[114] On this point, see Smillie, I. (2000) 'Inside the wire? Civil-Military Cooperation in Complex Emergencies', mimeo.

[115] For example, Donini (1998) op. cit. p. 103.

In Somalia, the relationship between humanitarian and political actors is dogged by contentions over the extent to which the UN is supporting the TNG as the basis for centralised authority over Somalia. The incipient administrations in both Puntland and Somaliland both refuse to recognise the TNG as a central authority, and the representative of the Secretary-General was declared persona non grata in Somaliland as a result of the UN's support for the TNG. The UN humanitarian agencies described how they had to distance themselves from *'that part of the UN'* in order to maintain operational effectiveness and personal security One international NGO chose to withdraw from all committees in the SACB except sectoral technical committees because it perceived the UN to have neglected its humanitarian responsibilities by giving legitimacy to what the international NGO argued was a belligerent group. It believed the UN had therefore implicitly declared itself as politically partisan.

Likewise in the DRC, tensions between humanitarian actors and the political and military were animated by the concern of the humanitarians to distance themselves from a peace operation apparently discredited in the eyes of the population. One debate centred on the potential negative implications for the Humanitarian Coordinator being designated the Deputy SRSG. Another bone of contention was the role of the Humanitarian Liaison Officers (HLOs) of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).[116] Although agreement to incorporate the HLOs into the OCHA offices had been hammered out on the ground in Goma and Kisangani, in Kinshasa, MONUC's director of civil affairs proposed that MONUC should be doing humanitarian coordination. This was interpreted by one interviewee as MONUC '*doing an Angola*' – using humanitarian aid as a way to retain presence and avoid downsizing in the absence of forward movement in the Lusaka Peace Process.

In the DRC, NGOs and UN agencies alike were at pains to distance themselves from MONUC. Again, UN staff described having to explain to local populations, authorities and NGOs that they were *'not the political part of the UN'*. This extended to international NGOs not attending meetings convened by MONUC in Kinshasa in order to demonstrate their separation. As a UN staff member remarked, *'Wherever we are associated with political strategies, we increase our own vulnerability and risk.'*

6.2 Views in the UN Secretariat

The situation on the ground is compounded by the fact that, at the highest levels in the Secretariat, views are divided, or appear to fluctuate, on whether humanitarian assistance should be insulated from or integrated into broader political frameworks. The Secretary-General has stressed the importance of respecting the distinction between humanitarian and military activities in order to prevent irreparable damage to the principle of impartiality and humanitarian assistance.[117] But he has also argued the converse.[118] Among high level personnel within the Secretariat who were interviewed, humanitarian agencies' desire for distance was variously characterised as an attempt to avoid control or discipline, as bureaucratic blocking, or as an aversion to dialogue. Such views were often accompanied by arguments about how humanitarian aid must necessarily be subject to political priorities and, where possible, serve the UN's political agenda. (Assertions that humanitarian aid does more harm than good buttressed the logic of this position.) One interviewee in the Secretariat talked of humanitarian aid as a vital part of a *'hearts and minds strategy'* for peacekeepers.

6.3 The Role of the SRSG

Tensions also converge around debates about the role of SRSGs and the extent to which the SRSG is accountable for all aspects of the UN's strategy in any given country. In countries where peace operations are deployed, the primacy of the SRSG has been the proposed mechanism by which coherence is assured. However, interviews revealed that in a number of instances SRSGs have interpreted 'coherence' as a justification for them to gain political mileage from control over humanitarian assets. Ockwell (1999) further substantiates this, noting that SRSGs in Afghanistan, Angola, Somalia and Liberia all requested WFP to *'adjust their programmes'* to facilitate their political negotiations. For the politicians this may be expedient. But for the humanitarians it was necessary to resist such 'coherence' in order to preserve the distinction between political and humanitarian spheres essential to sustaining respect for humanitarian principles.

[116] MONUC is one of the first missions to have a civil affairs unit, including sections for child protection, human rights and humanitarian affairs.
[117] Annan, K. (2000c) op. cit.
[118] Annan, K. (2000a) Statement of the Secretary-General to the meeting of the Security Council on humanitarian aspects of issues before the Council, 9 March (United Nations. New York)

The Humanitarian Coordinator has a key role to play in upholding this distinction. The enthusiasm in some quarters for Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators to also become deputy to the SRSG – under discussion in the DRC; now a reality in Sierra Leone – further complicates the picture for the humanitarians in projecting a clear image of their independence from political strategies.

6.4 Coherence and the Brahimi Report

A key part of the coherence debate coalesces around the silence about the nature of the strategic goals of coherent strategies.[119] For example, the push for all aspects of UN strategies to converge around peacebuilding in the wake of the Brahimi report is a form of 'coherence' that is largely seen as unproblematic, yet it masks unarticulated political agendas and the potential politicisation of humanitarianism. In the report, the content of peacebuilding is depoliticised, stripped of the questions about whose interests it serves. This vagueness masks the potential for peacebuilding to be the fulfilment of the 'monopolitics of liberal peace'.[120] This is reinforced by the report's silence on when to intervene to conduct peacebuilding. It cannot be assumed that peacebuilding, like peacekeeping, is apolitical.

Nor can it be assumed that peacebuilding is humanitarian.[121] The Brahimi report's proposal that humanitarian aid buttress the success of peace operations by giving Force Commanders the wherewithal to provide humanitarian assistance is a powerful example of the potential for politicisation.[122]

6.5 The Potential Divisions among the Humanitarians

As with intra-humanitarian coordination, the relationship of UN agencies with non-UN humanitarians is a critical part of the debate about the interface between political, military and humanitarian action. The coherence sought or required of UN humanitarians has a major significance for their relationship with other humanitarian actors. As one humanitarian agency in the DRC put it, *'The more the UN combines the two, the more difficult it is for us.'* While some parts of the UN were clear that greater proximity to MONUC would jeopardise their relationship with NGOs, senior officials within MONUC dismissed this as an exaggeration, arguing that NGOs should not dictate to the UN. Key players in the UN Secretariat also appear dismissive of any dilemma, arguing that UN agencies have different responsibilities from NGOs. This is clearly true. However, the humanitarian label links all those who use it.

Furthermore, NGOs are key players in the humanitarian system. As one UN interviewee commented, *'What is not understood in this building [the Secretariat] is that NGOs do the majority of the response.'* Questions raised by interviewees included: if UN humanitarians are required to get closer to the political and military, will they lose their implementing partner NGOs who are the bulk of the implementing capacity? Will OCHA lose the other UN agencies? How will this affect the coordination and implementation of humanitarian action by the UN?

6.6 Conclusion

What emerges most strongly is the contrast between the emphasis on coherence from the key players in the Secretariat and the concern of humanitarian actors on the ground 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 frequently involves demonstrating separation from political and military actors.

[119] For a critique of an absence of framework or conceptual basis to guide military and humanitarian interaction see Lightburn, D. 'NATO and its New Role' in Whitman, J. & Pocock, D. (1996) *After Rwanda: The Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance* (Macmillan Press: London).

[120] That is, the UN institutions will take on responsibility to deliver a blueprint that is built on narrow disciplinary structures in much the same way that the World Bank and the IMF have pushed the 'mono-economics' of structural adjustment. See Macrae & Leader (2000) op.cit.

[121] The Brahimi report's attempt to redefine impartiality to imply judgement, rather than its meaning for humanitarians – that is, delivering aid solely on the basis of need, regardless of race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind – highlights the importance of humanitarians resisting its uncritical integration into the peacebuilding agenda

[122] For a critique on this see SCHR (2000) op cit.

What also emerges is the need for greater clarity on the part of all players on their respective roles. This will help to establish a clear division of labour and delimit responsibility among political, military and humanitarian actors, particularly around as yet undefined peacebuilding strategies.

The position that the ICRC adopts in relation to the rest of the humanitarian system offers instructive guidance on how to meet the challenge of articulating and institutionalising the appropriate relationship between political, military and humanitarian strategies and actors in the UN. The ICRC stresses the imperative to coordinate with, but not to be coordinated by, others in the humanitarian system. Or, as another interviewee put it: *'You've got to work closely together and keep your distance.'* Such an approach has four key elements:

1. **Advocacy:** Advocacy is a critical tool in situating humanitarian action in relation to political and military strategy. The endurance of the 'aid does more harm than good' argument among key parts of the Secretariat suggests that humanitarians have not advocated successfully enough about their strategies and actions on the ground. If they are to be effective in the face of dismissive attitudes to humanitarian aid, humanitarians must be clearer and more assertive in their advocacy about the limits and nature of humanitarian action and principles. Humanitarians also have to push politicians, diplomats, political affairs departments, the military, and the UNSC to uphold the right to humanitarian assistance and protection, and to assume their responsibility to work for peace and security. Humanitarian advocacy must highlight the humanitarian implications of political and military action, as well as highlighting the consequences of inaction for populations in danger and those that seek to assist and protect them. Numerous interviewees stressed that the ERC and OCHA should play a robust role in the Secretariat in this regard.

2. **Clear points of contact:** Experience suggests that separation is best maintained by having clear and limited points of contact to enable information flow between political, military and humanitarian strategies and actors. This has been the rationale behind the rise of Civil-Military Cooperation Commissions (CIMICs) and was vital for effective liaison in Somalia, the Former Yugoslavia, and East Timor, to name but a few.[123] Ambassador Brahimi's approach in Afghanistan was applauded: although his role was entirely political, he sought information from humanitarian agencies in order to base his decisions in the realities on the ground. Such contact can contribute to more nuanced and profound political analysis on the part of both humanitarians and diplomats to ensure *'a politically informed humanitarian response and a political response informed by humanitarian concerns'.*[124]

3. **Planning:** If this difficult relationship is to be clearly articulated and understood, it will be necessary to plan multifaceted strategies at headquarters and in the field. If not mutually reinforcing, at a minimum strategies must not undermine each other. Such planning is not easy. The struggles that have accompanied the strategic framework experience in Afghanistan offer important insights from which to learn and improve upon.[125] The timeframes of rapidly developing situations frequently inhibit effective planning. Often the lack of clear leadership and sufficient capacity to translate robust political analysis into integrated responses creates difficulties. Different ethical and political compromises accompany the different aspects of the UN's role. There are many examples of resistance on the part of political or humanitarian players to cooperate with one another.[126] The Secretariat and agency headquarters must quash these impulses.

4. **Political players should 'pull their weight':** In practice, integration of humanitarian action into political strategies has been diluted by the weakness or absence of any such political strategy, and the *'delegation of responsibility for political analysis and management from the sphere of diplomacy to that of humanitarian action.*[127] This highlights how the biggest challenge is not for humanitarians to toe the political line, but for effective political strategies to be put in place to address chronic political conflict and the violation of human rights. As the Brahimi report proposals suggest, this confers responsibility on DPA and DPKO to take on responsibility to provide analysis at the service of the UN system and Member States. Humanitarians should be able to call on the politicians and diplomats for analysis and for diplomatic support and leverage.

[123] For a concise and insightful account of the East Timor experience see Elmquist, M. (1999) 'CIMIC in East Timor', mimeo.
[124] Macrae & Leader (2000) op. cit.
[125] The reviews of the strategic framework that are currently underway are fundamental to this.
[126] For example, the findings of the IASC Post-Conflict Reintegration Group say peace processes do not consult humanitarians. Both Somalia and Kosovo case studies revealed how political players were not required to liaise with humanitarians.
[127] Macrae & Leader (2000) op.cit.

7: OCHA'S ROLE

From its inception, and like its predecessor DHA, OCHA has found itself in the invidious position of having a mandate to coordinate but minimal means or clout to achieve it, in a system that has multiple obstacles to coordination, and shows determined resistance to its coordination role. The fact that the shift from DHA to OCHA cut back on posts funded from the core budget is a further indication of weak institutional commitment to the coordination function. This section briefly presents some of the study's findings on OCHA's role, and outlines some of OCHA's perceived successes, failures, obstacles to change and thus some of the challenges ahead.

7.1 The Successes

OCHA has been judged effective when it has been able to provide dynamic, highly competent and experienced people at the service of the whole humanitarian community. In some instances, these individuals have provided leadership. In others situations, OCHA has provided hardworking, high-calibre people to work alongside the Humanitarian Coordinators. This was generally a feature of the case studies and was noted and valued by people across the system, including NGOs and the Red Cross who, as discussed above, often feel ignored or excluded by the UN.

One particular feature common to successes in leadership or support was the quality of analysis and vision offered by OCHA staff. As highlighted in Section 5, analysis is invaluable in a time-constrained system that has to balance pressures to respond with devising strategies to meet needs for assistance and protection and the challenge of situating humanitarian action in relation to political and military strategies.

Another feature of OCHA's successes has been in negotiating access of beneficiaries to humanitarian aid and protection. As noted earlier, there is some ambivalence about whether OCHA should do this for the whole system but the value of past efforts are widely acknowledged as positive.

OCHA increased its credibility in its early days by playing an effective advocacy role. Interviewees emphasised that this needs to be maintained and strengthened, particularly given OCHA's position inside the Secretariat as the principal advisor to the Secretary-General on humanitarian affairs and through the ERC's role representing the broader humanitarian community and its concerns for the victims of conflict and disasters. However, key players also expressed concern about OCHA's ability to be an effective counterweight to the political pressures that converge in the Secretariat. OCHA has conceded that it has not yet fulfilled its potential advocacy role.

7.2 The Failures

Despite the above achievements, OCHA undermines its role by failing to deliver the required coordination services with the right support at the right time with the right resources. All too many staff are slow to be deployed, given uncertain or no contracts, are poorly briefed before getting to the field, and denied effective handovers from previous incumbents of the position. OCHA also contributes to adhocracy by failing to standardise the functions it provides from one country to the next, and by having few opportunities for staff to learn from one another.

OCHA is aware that it lacks the administrative procedures to support an organisation in the field. Both the structural constraints of an office divided between New York and Geneva and financial constraints were partly blamed by interviewees but weak management was also criticised.

This combination of financial, structural and management constraints were also cited as the cause of the contractual difficulties that beset OCHA's staff, leading to high staff turnover. For an organisation that depends so heavily on the calibre of its people this should be considered a critical failure.

7.3 The Threats to Change

Along with weak management there are other obstacles to implementing change, within and without OCHA. The strength of UN agencies' suspicions of OCHA, particularly evident in concerns about OCHA's Change Process, do not bode well.

In the DRC and Kosovo, the team was struck by repeated agency efforts to minimise the profile accorded to OCHA even where OCHA staff were chiefly responsible for a particular action. In debates about coordination options for the DRC prior to the December 2000 inter-agency mission, no UN interviewee mentioned OCHA's role in coordination. The resistance of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Kosovo to name the head of the OCHA office as his deputy could be seen as another manifestation of this.

Yet OCHA also jeopardises its potential achievements when it fails to consult or engage others effectively.[128] It is clearly tempting for OCHA to circumvent others when to do otherwise risks impasse because of the entrenched resistance in parts of the UN to OCHA performing its mandated role, or because of the time consumed in settings where time is precious. Yet evidence suggests that failing to engage others is simply counter-productive for OCHA's credibility among agencies (even if not for timely responses to people in need).

OCHA needs to be clear that it is at the service of the system. Its Change Management report is clear, as are those at the highest levels within OCHA, that service is critical to OCHA's role. Yet among field staff, one gets an impression that some staff are resistant to being accorded what they see as a subservient role. The risk is that OCHA loses sight of the role it has to enhance the efforts and operations of others and that coordination activities become an end in themselves.

The push from higher levels within OCHA to raise OCHA's profile also feeds fears that OCHA's service orientation is a rhetorical device rather than an organisational commitment. In the inevitable search for funds, it was clear that OCHA should be seeking funding for coordination and coordinated outcomes rather than for its own agency profile. OCHA should also be clear that its profile will be earned by the reputation of the services it provides and the quality of work it does, rather than through the pursuance of profile for its own sake.

As highlighted above, although the support of key donors is clearly important for OCHA to be able to play its mandated role, it is also vital that OCHA resists being solely driven by donor preferences and agendas. OCHA must resist the temptation to repeat the DHA experience of broadening its activities and thus diluting its impact in its core tasks. Such resistance is also essential if OCHA is to be an effective advocate on the rights to humanitarian assistance and protection: donor governments that are 'Friends' of OCHA are among those responsible for the skewed geographical allocation of humanitarian aid.

It is also important as donor support may contain a sting in the tail: donor willingness to place trust funds in OCHA's hands feeds the fears of other agencies about mushrooming services and empire-building. Several OCHA interviewees commented that DHA's trust funds that had been cut are re-emerging. While welcomed by some – particularly some staff within OCHA who are exhausted by the frustration of being expected to support coordination but having 'nothing to offer' – it is not clear that this enthusiasm translates into greater donor commitment to the discipline and focus that coordinated outcomes requires. Donors may be setting OCHA up to fail.

7.4 Conclusion: The Challenges

OCHA's unenviable position of having a mandate that is undermined by lack of authority, resistance from UN agencies, and uncertain funding (as well as fluctuating performance on its own part) is a another prime example of the structural obstacles to UN coordination. Setting aside the possibility of fundamental structural change, this section has focused on how OCHA can build its legitimacy and gain support. It has highlighted that, in the field, OCHA's authority comes from providing quality coordination services that are needed through the quality of its staff. The team strongly suggests that OCHA pursue this role, and become a centre of excellence for coordination skills, tools and systems in the countries in which it operates. To do this it needs to be able to get into the field quickly with good people and the necessary equipment. This is something that is desired throughout the system.

[128] The focal points for this study in WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP and DPA correctly laid this charge at the conduct of the early stages of this study.

Yet fundamental to OCHA's role is its position in the Secretariat – in the words of one interviewee, OCHA is *'half in and half out'*. That is, OCHA and the ERC, while being part of the humanitarian community, also has its membership of the Senior Management Group, its role in ECHA and ECPS, and its regular briefings of the president of the UNSC, has a seat at the table of the Secretary-General, as well as clear points of contact with the political and peacekeeping parts of the Secretariat, and, critically, the key decision-making organ on peace and security on the UN Member States. This puts it in a unique position for advocacy. It also presents a distinct challenge for OCHA: both to leverage its proximity to the Secretary-General's office from which it can derive authority, while continuing to engage in robust advocacy with the Secretary-General and the highest levels of the Secretariat *'fighting the humanitarian's corner'*.

Indeed, a very clear message that came out of this study was the importance of OCHA maintaining and expanding its advocacy role. At the highest levels in the Secretariat, this advocacy should focus on challenging particular interpretations of coherence as outlined in the previous section. This study's findings suggest that it is vital for OCHA to strategise with its sister UN agencies and other humanitarians about how to push this advocacy agenda and to boost the sense that OCHA is representing a shared humanitarian viewpoint during UN Secretariat debates and decisions.

As a result of its Change Process, OCHA has set itself important goals.[129] OCHA's challenge now is a paradigmatic one: to elicit the support of others – agencies, the Secretariat, and Member States – to allow and enable it to implement the Change Process's recommendations and successfully fulfil its mandate. To persuade its critics, OCHA must get better at doing what it is allowed to do.

Specific Areas for Action:

- **Coordination services and tools**: In addition to the experiences laid out in Section 5, the team concludes that OCHA should consolidate and develop its materials on coordination, drawing on its existing documents, including the UNDAC Handbook, as well as other agency handbooks. In addition, OCHA should be able to provide coordination training materials.
- **Excellence in access negotiations, advocacy and political analysis** are all seen as key roles for OCHA. To do such negotiations effectively requires rock solid analysis, as well as back-up capacity and resources devoted to this time-consuming activity.
- **Building in predictability**: The IASC should urgently agree standard operating procedures for OCHA field offices. If OCHA is to play an effective role in offering coordination services for the benefit of Coordinators, it is essential that the nature of the support and the nature of the relationship are clarified and agreed at the IASC. This includes the question of whether the head of an OCHA office should also be the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator. OCHA should ensure that such services are consistently provided across the world. Bringing staff together regularly to learn from one another's experiences is one route by which to assess consistency and improve practice.
- It is imperative that OCHA **retains highly competent core staff**. Current levels of turnover are disruptive and threaten loss of capacity. In addition, getting secondments from other humanitarian agencies was seen as a key to the success of the DHA, and should remain so for OCHA. Such secondments should be seen as important for staff development rather than as deviation from career progression in the specific agency. It should also be possible for senior OCHA staff to have secondments to other UN agencies and, indeed, to Red Cross agencies and international NGOs. The latter option would strengthen the skills of OCHA staff while the former could increase ownership and interest from UN agencies in enabling OCHA to fulfil its mandate.
- In its concern to **make coordination services more systematic**, it will be important that OCHA does **not merely provide another layer or allow coordination activities to become an end in themselves.** Where coordination is already happening, OCHA should offer to facilitate, add expertise, or assist by relieving others of their responsibilities for coordination.
- While the onus is in part on OCHA to perform and persuade, the study team maintains that there should also be **pressure on agencies to respect OCHA's mandate** from the Secretary-General and donors.

[129] *'Early deployment of sufficient, qualified OCHA personnel in support of a Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator is an important element in successful humanitarian coordination...Coordination is effective only if our partners perceive its 'value-added', in particular at the field level. OCHA must strive to create a culture of excellence by providing the best possible tools, managers and personnel in support of the R/HC and its humanitarian partners.'* The report notes the list of functions of an OCHA field office that link with the tasks of the Humanitarian Coordinator. It notes the need to increase its headquarters support to its increased presence in the field.

8: CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The Obstacles and Incentives to Change

There are two particularly striking characteristics of the discussion of humanitarian coordination. The first is the dichotomy between the resounding consensus about *why* coordination should be done – to maximise the effectiveness of humanitarian action – and yet the continuing ferocity of the debate about *how* it should be done. As this study has noted, the greater the focus on why coordination is important, the greater the likelihood that the debate diminishes and that effective coordination is done.

The second is that there is so little that is new to say. This has been a theme of this study as it presents the conclusions from past studies, interviews and case studies. The report has set out in some detail the recurring picture 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 adhocracy 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. Despite the urgency of the task, and the potential impact on human lives of poorly coordinated humanitarian responses, the ERC, OCHA and Coordinators at the field level are all denied the ability to direct or manage humanitarian responses. Instead, all 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. As this study has sought to emphasise, UN Member States and donor governments have pivotal responsibility for the structure and performance of the UN humanitarian system – and thus the changes necessary to resolve the problems that derive from them.

Yet despite the manifold obstacles to coordination, remarkably, humanitarian coordination does happen – although performance remains patchy – either because effective Coordinators build consensus around coordination through strong leadership, because the coordination on offer is clearly added value, or because the context acts as an incentive to coordinate.

Thus the 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. It is incumbent upon them that they do so.

It is worth emphasising the responsibility that the UN has in the eyes of others. Governments and humanitarian agencies have made their expectations clear. Indeed, Resolution 46/182 said it best, stating that the UN has *'a central and unique role to play in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community.'* Yet this study has shown that there are others, in particular donors, who will fill any vacuums left by a UN system that fails to deliver on its central coordinating role. Thus, the onus is on the UN to perform to prevent the further bilateralisation of humanitarian response.

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 a 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.[130]

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.

[130] For example, see Ingram (1993) op. cit. Ingram, former WFP director, suggests looking outside the UN system on which to base a restructured humanitarian order. See also Minear, L. in Donini (1998) op. cit.; Righter (1995) op.cit. even suggests the OECD as a focus for coordinating relief.

8.3 The 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 respect OCHA's role. 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 adhocracy 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 DPA and 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.

8.5.1 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 recommendation 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 and to boost the sense that OCHA is able to represent humanitarian actors within the UN Secretariat debates and decisions. The IASC – given its broad membership – is the obvious forum for such strategising.

8.5.2 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 constitute 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 themselves to making handovers between staff more systematic by including them in all job descriptions as a corporate 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.