

ALNAP STRATEGY

2008–2013

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# Foreword

*This new strategy will enable the ALNAP Network to meet the challenges of the next five years. The strategy builds on 'The Vision for ALNAP', launched in 2002, by providing an updated, more precise direction for the future, set in the broader context of the changing humanitarian landscape.*

**Part 1** re-emphasises the original ALNAP Vision and provides a clear mandate and mission. It also articulates four key values that encapsulate our ethos and way of working.

**Part 2** explains the expected strategic context for our work in the future, and outlines recent trends, challenges and future expectations. We believe that the humanitarian community has to work cooperatively to meet these challenges, and that future success depends on mutual trust between individuals and agencies, and on openness to learning.

**Part 3** describes ALNAP's strategic horizon and addresses the key issues that we will tackle directly in the next five years. Of particular importance is the emphasis on bridging gaps between humanitarians in the 'South' and the 'North', and between policy-makers and practitioners. With this aim in mind, our new strategy explicitly takes a global approach to learning, along with a renewed focus on ensuring that outputs have real practical utility.

**Part 4** presents our five strategic objectives, outlining specific actions that we expect will bring about a raft of specific results. It stresses the continued importance of improving learning and

evaluations and ensuring better networking to improve performance. We will be more systematic in our monitoring of progress on performance and will aim to inform and influence senior decision makers in the system to bring about positive change.

**Part 5** suggests how we might meet the big challenge of monitoring the effects of our work, to assess the contribution ALNAP makes to improving learning, accountability and performance.

The implementation of this strategy will require a carefully structured approach consisting of a workplan for implementation, a communications strategy and a monitoring plan. Each of these will be developed and put in place by the Secretariat.

I would like to thank the many individuals who have actively contributed to this strategy, and continue to participate in making ALNAP an effective and respected forum for active learning. A willingness to work together in this way demonstrates the collective commitment we all have to improving the lives of those people who are affected by humanitarian crises.

**Eleanor Monbiot, Chair, ALNAP**

# 1. Vision, Mandate, Mission and Values

## **Vision**

ALNAP's Vision is of a world where the lives of all people affected by any humanitarian crisis are valued equally by the humanitarian system. Humanitarian assistance will be offered to those in need wherever they live in the world and regardless of their geographical origin, gender, religion or politics. Humanitarian assistance will be in proportion to humanitarian need, and of high quality; it will support longer-term recovery and development processes, enhance safety when necessary and be delivered in a way that respects the dignity of the recipient.

How humanitarian assistance is organised will be more systematic, and delivery will more closely reflect humanitarian principles, norms and codes. Active partnership with affected people, local administrations and civil-society groups will be more evident and will reflect an explicit recognition by the international humanitarian community of the importance of local skills and knowledge. Humanitarian agencies will act accountably and will ensure that learning and change processes, including evaluations, are part of a commitment to continuous improvement.

## **Mandate**

ALNAP is dedicated to improving the accountability and quality of humanitarian

action by sharing lessons, identifying common problems and, where appropriate, building consensus on common approaches and solutions.

## **Mission**

ALNAP's mission is to contribute to the Vision through operationalising its mandate.

It will continue to foster a culture of active learning and accountability to improve humanitarian performance. Specifically, ALNAP will improve the quality and utilisation of different types of evaluations and learning, and will provide a solid platform for reflection and collective action.

ALNAP will work to provide direction and energy to initiatives and innovations that foster organisational and sectoral change.

And ALNAP will move towards a global approach by expanding its reach through the development of a series of regional and country level networks, based on the current ALNAP model, which will be maintained by their Members with strategic guidance and support from the Secretariat.

In this way, ALNAP will assume the role of a leading agent for system-wide change and improvement in the humanitarian sector.

## **Values**

There are four values that underpin ALNAP's mission.

### ***Equality***

All actors across the humanitarian spectrum, regardless of race, geographical origin, gender, religion or politics, have important experiences to bring to the table. Full Members meet as equals in all ALNAP fora and are respected as equal co-owners.

### ***Active engagement***

ALNAP's effectiveness depends upon the active engagement of its Members. Thus, Full Members and their representatives proactively engage as supporters, disseminators, promoters and ambassadors, within their own organisations and networks and the sector as a whole.

### ***Openness to learning and sharing***

Humanitarian performance can be improved by learning from previous experiences and by judiciously applying those lessons in future planning and practice. ALNAP enjoys high levels of collaboration between Full Members, all of whom are open to learning and are committed to acting on and sharing those experiences, both positive and negative, throughout the Network.

### ***Neutrality***

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all Full Members and others in the humanitarian sector, ALNAP does not take collective positions or take sides with regard to contentious issues of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## 2. The Strategic Context

Since ALNAP was established 10 years ago, we have seen the continuing evolution of a number of social and natural trends, including: global warming and the related effects on the environment; growing economic imbalances between rich and poor; the so-called 'war on terror'; new types of armed conflict; population growth and demographic changes such as increased 'South-to-North' migration. All of these have had an influence on how recent humanitarian crises have been shaped in recent years, and are likely to influence the nature of emergencies in the future. Indeed, we recognise the very real possibility that crises are likely to become both more widespread, complex, and characterised by catastrophic combinations of different kinds of human vulnerabilities (e.g. social, economic, political, class, race, gender, etc) .

Given the magnitude and increasing media exposure of humanitarian crises, it is no surprise that the funding of humanitarian assistance has steadily increased over the past decade. In 2006 an estimated US\$18 billion was mobilised by governments, NGOs, the private sector and the public. New donors are emerging, and the volume and number of sources of aid are also expected to increase. As the 2006 *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action* highlights, informal systems and looser social networks are also providing humanitarian aid and the

formal system will have to find new ways of harmonising with these processes.

This increased activity is not linked to disbursement of humanitarian aid in proportion to humanitarian need. Indeed, there are no agreed measures of humanitarian need. And responses to high-profile emergencies remain driven mainly by political imperatives and media exposure, while many other humanitarian crises are still relatively neglected.

Increasing numbers of people are vulnerable to natural calamities, which highlight the fact that international humanitarian system has been unable to establish effective synergies with those concerned with preparedness, recovery, reconstruction and development.

While there have been efforts to promote International Humanitarian Law and humanitarian principles, the last decade has also demonstrated that it has not become any easier to persuade warring parties and governments to accept the right of humanitarians to act. It is still difficult to gain access to, and provide protection for, vulnerable people.

The job of the practitioner has become increasingly complex as aid agendas overlap more with those of other actors including the military, the human-rights community,

those concerned with risk reduction and development, politicians and the media.

Given these trends, it is anticipated that humanitarian interventions will become more widespread, and more challenging to implement in keeping with both humanitarian principles and the principles of quality management. Many of the lessons from the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda have not easily been

turned into better practice and improved performance.

This is despite various reform initiatives in the United Nations and the international donor community, new standards and codes of good practice, inter-agency quality initiatives and the application of modern management techniques in aid agencies. Getting this right represents a major challenge for the entire humanitarian system in the years to come.

### 3. Operational Background

Over the past 10 years, ALNAP has grown steadily and in 2007 there are 57 Full Members from across the spectrum of the humanitarian system. With its unique system-wide membership, ALNAP has demonstrated that collective endeavour by the membership, supported by the Secretariat, is a cost-effective means of delivering important products and services which are valued by its members and the wider humanitarian sector. Through its biannual meetings, ALNAP has provided a unique inclusive and standing forum for active learning and exchange on better practice.

ALNAP's work is premised on recognising that improved performance requires sector-wide change, as well as change in individual organisations. Experience gained over the ten years of ALNAP's existence, and the commitment of ALNAP Members to date, shows that individual organisations can and do benefit from a sharing of perspectives and experiences to improve their own learning, accountability and performance. There is significant experience and capacity within the membership, as well as the will to continue to work jointly with other initiatives and agencies. There is interest in new forms of shared working, including regional and thematic communities of practice.

ALNAP has worked to identify common problems and facilitate shared approaches to improving humanitarian action with new and innovative ideas. The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) demonstrated that complex multi-agency evaluations can bring increased accountability and have a significant influence on policy agendas. There is a clear added value for ALNAP to play a central role in similar innovative approaches in the future.

Through the Review of Humanitarian Action, ALNAP monitors the evaluation of humanitarian action and undertakes reviews of specific practices of interest to the Membership. There is scope for a more structured analysis of key performance areas, enabling tracking of changes in different aspects of humanitarian practice.

In addition to these major initiatives, ALNAP scans the environment to identify gaps in existing knowledge and identifies resources for the production of guides, lessons papers and other products.

ALNAP recognises and respects the diversity within its membership and understands that accountability and quality are concepts that are understood and acted upon in different ways. ALNAP is therefore committed to working with other inter-agency groups and initiatives with the shared goal of improving quality,

accountability and performance, and believes that this will help to bring about greater collective impact.

ALNAP works to improve the quality of the evaluative evidence base, through mechanisms such as the Meta-evaluation and the Evaluation Quality Pro Forma. In the Evaluative Reports Database (ERD), it has provided the sector with a valuable source of evaluation knowledge. ALNAP also undertakes systematic analysis to propose changes in practice that will improve the delivery of protection and assistance. The evaluation syntheses in the ALNAP Reviews of Humanitarian Action are a good example of such analyses providing a solid platform upon which the system can reflect on performance issues.

However, ALNAP has also identified a number of obstacles and constraints that prevent evaluation findings and recommendations from being acted upon (see RHA 2006, Chapter 3). These constraints need to be addressed by all actors in the sector, and to this end ALNAP is working towards a utilisation-focused approach to all of its work on evaluations in the future.

ALNAP will continue to provide a platform for Joint and system-wide evaluations, and promote the take-up of innovations such as Real Time Evaluations.

ALNAP recognises the vital importance of communications both for servicing the Network itself and for providing clear messages that will contribute to improving

overall humanitarian performance. The ALNAP audience is mainly member organisations that include a multiplicity of potential audiences, including programme practitioners, humanitarian policy staff and senior decision-makers. Full Member representatives will continue to play a pivotal role in accessing these groups.

Within the wider humanitarian sector, ALNAP has been able to spread ideas and information about humanitarian practice and policy. The audience here is mainly humanitarian practitioners, who can benefit themselves or, through their decision-making, improve humanitarian performance to the benefit of those affected by crises. There are also secondary audiences, such as the media and academics who influence thinking about humanitarian performance.

A more strategic approach to communication will also allow ALNAP to meet the needs and expectations of members in a more proactive and cohesive fashion.

The current global environment demands a more diversified and a more joined-up approach to learning and there is scope for ALNAP to bring in a wider variety of voices from around the globe.

The gap between the world of Western-based policy-makers and that of field practitioners is also recognised, and ALNAP can explicitly help to bridge that gap by encouraging learning and dialogue between different groups and by producing a range

of products accessible and useful for different stakeholders.

ALNAP believes that the need for such a forum will persist for as long as there is a need for dialogue and improvement.

The Strategic Objectives which follow set out how ALNAP will ensure it is relevant, authoritative and cutting-edge in the future.

## 4. Strategic Objectives, 2008–2013

ALNAP has five strategic objectives which it will be working towards in the next five years. Under each strategic objective, various actions will be taken, with associated implementation measures and expected results. A mechanism to monitor this work will be established.

***Strategic Objective 1*** ALNAP will establish stronger links between learning processes and improvements in humanitarian policy and field practice

***Strategic Objective 2*** ALNAP will advocate for and actively promote improvements in performance in the humanitarian sector.

***Strategic Objective 3*** ALNAP will improve system-wide fora for active learning and the exchange of experiences and ideas.

***Strategic Objective 4*** ALNAP will work to improve the quality and utilisation of evaluations within the Network and throughout the humanitarian system.

***Strategic Objective 5*** ALNAP will expand its global reach and engagement in order to better promote humanitarian learning.

Each of these is described in more detail in the following pages.

## **Strategic Objective 1**

### **ALNAP will establish stronger links between learning processes and improvements in humanitarian policy and field practice**

#### *What will be done*

Strengthening of learning processes and tailoring outputs to contribute to specific improvements in humanitarian policy and field practice.

#### *Specific actions will include:*

- Being alert to the existing and emerging knowledge gaps identified by the membership in humanitarian policy and practice, and working to fill these gaps with good quality tools and products
- Ensuring that ALNAP products enable good practice and improved performance by gathering feedback from end users (including Full Members) on the use and influence of products such as lessons papers, field guides and manuals, outputs from the discussions in ALNAP fora, etc.
- Monitoring the take up of new ideas (including evaluation recommendations) and how they positively influence change in the sector
- Dynamic and creative use of strategic communications (including the ALNAP website) to target stakeholder groups with clear messages and learning

products in a timely and relevant fashion.

#### *What will be seen*

- A better understanding of the missing links between learning processes and application in policy and practice
- Increased usage of ALNAP products in the field, including lessons papers and guides
- Increased understanding of how individual agencies use ALNAP products and what kinds of influence may have resulted
- Enhanced quality in humanitarian programming and operations as a result of learning.

## Strategic Objective 2

**ALNAP will advocate for and actively promote improvements in performance in the humanitarian sector**

### *What will be done*

Appropriate advocacy and active encouragement for agencies to learn and act accountably in order to improve humanitarian performance.

### *Specific actions will include:*

- Re-orienting the RHA to become an annual structured commentary on performance related issues and to make a judgement on the progress the system has made in trying to improve performance, potentially incorporating a Humanitarian Performance Index
- Advocating for agencies to be open to learning and sharing experiences, using existing and new channels including senior management networks
- Encouraging programme managers and evaluators to canvass the views of the beneficiary population and local groups and to support appropriate forms of beneficiary involvement in the design and implementation of programmes
- Promoting and advocating for more agencies to place evaluation reports in the public domain
- Increasing collaboration with other networks and organisations to improve quality and accountability.

### *What will be seen:*

- A broader readership for the RHA, including high-level policy-makers and senior operational managers, and a higher profile for its findings
- Improvements in the performance of specific agencies in the areas of learning and accountability in relation to the proposed Humanitarian Performance Index
- An increase in the quality of participatory methodologies in evaluations submitted to the ERD and assessed through the Quality Pro Forma; more evaluations show evidence of more participation of beneficiary populations in the programme cycle
- More evaluation reports in the public domain and more citations of evaluations in the media
- An increase in collaborative processes and shared outputs and outcomes with other networks and organisations.

### **Strategic Objective 3**

#### **ALNAP will improve system-wide fora for active learning and the exchange of experiences and ideas**

##### *What will be done*

Strengthening of the provision of existing fora and provision of a range of mechanisms and platforms for further collaboration and knowledge sharing.

##### *Specific actions will include:*

- Continuing to develop and improve ALNAP biannual meetings and taking opportunities for *ad hoc* meetings of common interest to ALNAP Members
- Putting in place follow-up mechanisms at biannual meetings
- Enabling and facilitating specific ALNAP Member sub-groupings for joint work on specific projects and learning
- Seeking opportunities to collaborate and engage with other meetings in the sector
- Piloting thematic communities of practice on issues of relevance to the community.

##### *What will be seen*

- Biannual feedback forms demonstrate increasing levels of satisfaction by participants

- Ideas emerging from meetings inform and influence the wider humanitarian community
- Increased use of thematic seminars and workshops; more varied and tailored themes according to regional location; the increased use of professional facilitators and local and regional participants
- Feedback from *ad hoc* meetings shows high levels of satisfaction
- ALNAP Members continue to work on subjects of mutual interest
- Better two-way communication between policy-makers and practitioners around learning issues.

#### **Strategic Objective 4**

**ALNAP will work to improve the quality and utilisation of evaluations within the Network and throughout the humanitarian system**

##### *What will be done*

Working to improve humanitarian evaluations through greater emphasis on utilisation, the evidence base, and recommendations as a source of learning.

##### *Specific actions will include the following*

- Strengthening the coverage, credibility and take-up of the ALNAP Meta-evaluation and Quality Pro Forma
  - Exploring the evidence base of evaluation findings and recommendations
  - Improved learning about, and promotion of, innovative approaches such as Real Time Evaluations and multi-stakeholder joint evaluations
  - Improved learning through research and practical experience about how to promote better take-up of findings and recommendations (including those of the TEC and other key evaluations)
  - Enhancing the content of ALNAP evaluation training modules to include utilisation and the links between evaluation, learning and organisational change
- Improving evaluation capacity building through innovations such as distance learning and communities of practice.

##### *What will be seen*

- An improvement in the overall quality of evaluations scored in the ALNAP Meta-evaluation
- A more demonstrable link between evaluation findings, their take-up and change
- Productive discussions about the development and potential use of evaluation standards among the ALNAP members
- Better understanding of what value Real Time Evaluations and joint evaluations can bring to the system, and more use of the same
- An increase in the number of utilisation-focused evaluations being submitted to the ALNAP Evaluative Reports Database (ERD) and assessed in the Meta-evaluation
- Lessons learned from the take-up, or otherwise, of the TEC recommendations and other key documents among both individual agencies and across the system
- More people and agencies trained in utilisation-focused evaluations through ALNAP training modules.

## **Strategic Objective 5**

### **ALNAP will expand its global reach and engagement in order to better promote humanitarian learning**

#### *What will be done*

Active identification of, and capitalisation on, opportunities for extending the network, with a special emphasis on organisations in crisis-affected countries.

#### *Specific actions will include the following:*

- Strengthening the use of the ALNAP website and interactive materials to create more linkages with Southern-based organisations
- More biannual meetings in 'Southern' locations
- Engaging with representatives of those in crisis-affected countries
- Actively encouraging national actors' participation, through ensuring relevant and timely agendas and topics
- Seeking opportunities for developing and extending the network using 'regional hubs' and 'learning chapters' in the regions
- Establishing thematic learning groups that cut across the North-South divide.

#### *What will be seen*

- A more diverse network with more membership drawn from organisations based in crisis-affected countries

- A more global contribution to the exchange of ideas and learning
- More participation and contribution of experiences and learning from actors outside the traditional humanitarian sector, such as diaspora communities, new and emerging donors and the private sector.

## 5. Monitoring and Learning

As a learning network focused on the improvement of performance, it is increasingly crucial for ALNAP to practice what it preaches, and work to systematically learn from its progress against its objectives. However, it is important to be aware of the constraints facing ALNAP, and other similar initiatives, in bringing about change.

Specifically, change – institutional and social – is a long term, progressive, non-linear and highly uncertain process. Networks such as ALNAP can only influence the behaviours of those policy and institutional actors with whom they will be working directly, and these actors are often not those responsible for the decisions and actions that constitute (or bring about) change. There may be many other actors and forces that influence change, who are beyond the control of ALNAP, or indeed any other actor in the sector. And crucially, changes in ideas are often easier to bring about than changes in policy and practices.

Given the above, strategies for contributing to change need to be flexible and adaptable to changing contexts. Progress and contribution to change needs to be monitored in real time, by the development of a framework for capturing information and sharing within and across the ALNAP membership.

Measures of success of ALNAP need to focus on both the perceived movement towards the desired long term changes (set out in the Vision) and assessments of whether ALNAP has appropriately incorporated the lessons it has learned and is doing all it should and can to achieve those desired changes.

There are a number of key assumptions underlying the effective utilisation of ideas in policy and practice<sup>1</sup>.

1. The existence of comprehensive, credible evidence based on systematic learning exercises, including evaluations;
2. The ability of such evidence to provide a direct guide to decision-making in specific circumstances;
3. Knowledge of such evidence by all relevant actors;
4. Adequate resources (e.g. time, money, capacities) to act upon the evidence from learning exercises;
5. Sufficient incentive to apply the evidence;
6. Absence of substantial disincentives (material or non-material) to applying the evidence;

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<sup>1</sup> Drawn from Buse, K, Mays, N and Walt, G (2005) *Making Health Policy*, Open University Press

7. An implementation chain sufficiently short to ensure a good likelihood of compliance with the implications of the evidence.

These assumptions provide a starting point for a systematic framework for monitoring and learning from ALNAP's work, and assessing the contribution it makes to positive change. The great majority of ALNAP's mandate, mission and strategic objectives focus on the first three of these assumptions.

ALNAP aims to track progress and identify lessons (positive and negative) which relate to each of these core assumptions, tracking ALNAP's direct contribution to system-wide improvements in each of these areas. ALNAP also proposes to track how improvements in each of these areas, and increased advocacy efforts, contribute to improvements in the others.

With a more active focus on advocacy and encouragement, ALNAP hopes to use "soft power" to contribute to change in relation to the other four assumptions.