How can we improve humanitarian coordination?

Webinar transcript

The humanitarian coordination system is fairly effective when it comes to enhancing cooperation to prevent gaps and overlaps, and at supporting good practice on the ground. However, it's less good at addressing 'strategic', response-wide issues. Why is this? How can we fix it? How can we improve humanitarian coordination? That was the question facing the 45 key thinkers, practitioners and decision makers working on coordination, within and beyond the humanitarian sector, present at ALNAP’s 2016 meeting, ‘Working together to improve humanitarian coordination’. Informed by prior research by ALNAP, that meeting produced concrete, actionable recommendations across six areas, aimed at improving the humanitarian coordination system. This webinar presented and reflected upon on those recommendations, discussed progress made on them so far, and looked at how they can be taken forward.

Speakers:
PK - Paul Knox Clarke, ALNAP
LC - Leah Campbell, ALNAP
AD - Amos Doornbos, World Vision International
GN - Guelnoudji Ndjakounkossé, UNHCR
LH - Loretta Hieber-Girardet, OCHA

You can find out more about ALNAP’s work on humanitarian coordination at:
alnap.org/what-we-do/leadership-coordination
LC: Hello everyone, and welcome to ALNAP’s latest webinar, about how we can improve humanitarian coordination. My name is Leah Campbell, and I am a Senior Research Officer here at ALNAP, and I’ve been working with my colleague, who is also here with us today, Paul Knox-Clarke on humanitarian coordination and leadership issues for the last few years. I’m going to be hosting today’s webinar, and I want to say thank you to all of you who are joining us at the moment, as well as our set of panellists, who I’m going to introduce to you in a moment. A few logistical points to just take a note. You should see in your GoToWebinar panel, you have an option to send questions. You can also use this to send in your thoughts and comments throughout the webinar, and so if at any point you have a question, or you have an experience you might want to share, you can send these through to us and my colleague, Tim, will be reading these throughout the webinar, and we’ll do our best, towards the end of the session, in the second half, to incorporate as many of your questions and comments as we possibly can. So do feel free, at any point during the webinar, to send those in. We will also be drawing on some questions that people submitted in advance, so if you submitted a question as you registered for the webinar, hopefully you’ll hear it later on, and we’ll do our best to get through as many issues as we can, in a very big and complex issue, such as coordination. The other logistical note I will mention is that at the end of the webinar, you’ll be given a survey that’ll pop up on your screen, and we just encourage you to fill it out, I’ll remind you right as we end, because it’s really valuable to us to have feedback on what you think about the webinars.

So, thank you, again, to our 100 plus attendees who we have so far. I’m going to just introduce you to our panellists today, and while I do that, I thought we’d also hear who else is in the room. So we’re just going to start up a poll that you’ll see on your screen as I read through the bios, and this poll asks, kind of, who you are, going from folks who have no experience, and perhaps are thinking about coordination in the humanitarian sector for the first time today, all the way through to those who perhaps have been to the odd coordination meeting, but have not really gotten engaged, those who regularly engage in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, those who perhaps lead humanitarian coordination mechanisms at cluster level or similar, or those who support coordination from a HQ level. So obviously, there might be some of you who don’t exactly fit into these, but we are somewhat limited by the poll number of options and number of characters and so on. So, we’ll just do this as a kind of informal, get to know you of the audience, while I read the biographies. So, today with us, we have Guel from the Senior Protection-
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Protection Cluster Coordinator at UNHCR in DRC, where he’s been in post since August 2015. Guel is an experienced coordinator in humanitarian coordination, and he has also worked in civil and military coordination. He has really strong first-hand knowledge and practice of international humanitarian issues, including coordination both of the cluster approach and the transformative agenda, which he’s gained throughout his 14 years of UN work experience, with UNHCR OCHA, as well as political and peacekeeping missions. So, very welcome to you, Guel, and thanks for making time for us today.

We also have with us Lori Hieber-Girardet who is the Chief of OCHA’s inter-cluster coordination section in Geneva. In this capacity, Lori chairs the global clusters forum, and supports OCHA’s inter-cluster coordination in field operations. Prior to this role, Lori led OCHA’s work on coordinated assessments, and was also a senior advisor in the policy section. Her background includes positions with the ILO and WHO, including field assignments in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Lori is also a founder of Media Action International, one of the first NGOs to work on communicating with communities, and also worked as a former journalist, covering conflict areas.

We also have with us, today, Amos, from World Vision. Amos has a passion for information and figuring out applications for technology, to make the lives of crisis affected people and front line staff easier. He says he spends most of his time trying to convince people, or convince organisations, that technology is the easy part, and the real challenge is changing people’s behaviour, as well as organisational processes and culture. He’s amassed over 15 years of experience working around humanitarian aid in over 25 countries, and as I mentioned, at the moment, Amos is the Disaster Management Strategy and Systems Director at World Vision International.

And we also have with us, my colleague Paul Knox Clarke, and I realise in this moment that I don’t have a biography of him here, but Paul is our Head of Research, where he has been for just longer than I’ve been at ALNAP, so perhaps around six or seven years, and he’ll perhaps introduce himself when he gets started with the presentation.

So, before I turn to Paul, I’ll just perhaps close the poll and read out the results, so that we know who else is on the line today. It looks like we have quite a mix of people today, hopefully you can see the results as
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well. We have 20% of you, of the audience of 120 people so far, say pretty much no experience with coordination, which is quite a bit. We also have 24% who’ve been to a few meetings, but that’s it, 27% regularly participate in humanitarian coordination. 11% of you are cluster coordinators or similar, and 17% of you support coordination from HQ level. So that’s quite a diverse spread, and certainly each, kind of, level of experience is well represented, and hopefully our speakers can take that into account with their remarks throughout the day, that we have a diverse audience, so perhaps try and direct thoughts and discussion to the range of people who we have here today, and as I mentioned, do feel free to submit any questions if you feel like an area hasn’t been covered, or if, especially for those who have less experience, if you feel like you need a more, kind of, intro question to understand a point somebody’s made, do feel free to submit those questions. So, without further hesitation, I will turn over to my colleague, Paul, who will tell us a bit about himself, and also about the topic for today’s webinar.

PK: So, I won’t tell you very much about myself, because I’m much less interesting than the topic. I’m Paul Knox Clarke, I’m the Head of Research at ALNAP, the humanitarian network, and I’ve previously worked with organisations including WFP and Save the Children, in the field and in HQ positions. I am delighted that so many people are interested in this topic, as, I’m sure, are our expert panellists. It’s very kind of Lori, Amos and Guel to take part in this discussion today, particularly as it’s the second time they’ve taken part in a discussion like this, because they were important contributors to the meeting on which this presentation and the report is based. But more about that in a second. Maybe, just to give a little bit of background first, as Leah was saying, Leah and I have been working on the topic of humanitarian coordination from a research perspective for quite some time. Over the period of time, we were trying to identify, you know, that a lot of-, there was a lot of discussion in evaluations, I think in the state of the system, about the challenges around coordination. And so our first job was really to try and identify what those challenges were, to a level of understanding where it was possible to, sort of, start addressing those challenges. And, of course, we’re not the only people who have been doing this. A lot of work has been done by Lori, and her colleagues, and by the global cluster coordinators, and at country level, as well. So, you know, this is something, an area which has quite a lot of momentum, hopefully, behind it. From ALNAP’s side, what we did, was we did an extensive literature review, a large number of interviews, initially focusing on the clusters, later expanding to other members of HCTs and of inter-cluster coordination
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groups. We then took the results of all that to a number of global cluster meetings where we were kindly
invited, to sort of validate them, and get a sense of whether the challenges that we’d identified, through the
literature review and these extensive interviews, actually resonated with colleagues who were doing the job,
rather than just researching it. And they did, I think.

So the first report we did was-, identified some of the challenges, and also came up with some fairly broad
recommendations as to how they might be addressed. And that report, which is called Improving-, sorry, I
should know what our own reports that we wrote are called, but it’s not Improving Humanitarian
Coordination, it’s the Case of the Clusters, and it’s available on the ALNAP website, so do please go there
and download it, if you want to know more. So, that identified some challenges. We weren’t, I should say,
looking to do an assessment of the effectiveness, overall effectiveness of the clusters, at that point. It wasn’t
a research question. But it probably is worth noting that as we went through the interviews, and the
evaluations in particular, a pattern seemed to emerge around the effectiveness of the coordination system,
and that that was, in fact, probably, if something wasn’t there, you would have to invent it. That it was
much better having the system than not having the system, and that the system was really quite effective in
certain things, particularly in the gaps and overlaps area. Obviously not in every country, and not in every
cluster, but in addressing field level gaps and overlaps, and to a degree, in supporting technical
standardisation, that sort of operational work was working quite well. What didn’t seem to be working at
all was the, sort of, response-wide high level issues, and this was a pattern which came back from quite a
number of the countries where we worked.

So, we took, as I said, the results, and we then took them to a meeting which was organised here at ALNAP,
at the ODI in London, and we were lucky to be joined by over 50 specialists from across the coordination
landscape. These were people from OCHA, from HCR, from the cluster lead agencies, global cluster
coordinators, colleagues like Guel, who had the experience of doing coordination at the sharp end, as it
were, coordinators on the ground. Information management specialists, and also a number of people who’ve
been involved in emergency management and emergency coordination from outside the humanitarian
sector, who work, for example, for the New York Fire Brigade. So we had-, or the Colombian National
Disaster Management Agency. So we had a nice variety of specialisation there, but all focused down on
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coordination. And from that meeting, we basically came up with six areas where recommendations, very concrete recommendations, were made, and they were the six that you can see on the slide here, and I don’t think I need to read that for you, I hope everyone can see the slide. Under each of those, again, if you go to the website and you download the report, you will find it organised according to these six areas, and with specific recommendations, normally recommendations for specific bodies, under each of those areas.

We were quite excited by this, because we think that taken together, this is a solid set of recommendations. Some of them are more difficult than others, but they are all doable, and hopefully they would lead to significant improvements in areas where there are challenges around the current humanitarian system. The recommendations were not all for the IASC, I would point out, they were across the board. You know, the coordination system, whilst very much supported by OCHA, who put an awful lot into it, is, of course, a common- used resource, and everybody’s got to pull their weight. And so, you know, there were recommendations here for IASC, but also for OCHA, for the global clusters, for clusters and HCTs at country level, for cluster lead agencies, for quite a broad variety of organisations, and the nice thing, as well, is that as I go through some of these recommendations, I think you’ll recognise that quite a lot of these things are already happening. So, a lot of the recommendations were not about things that are new, but they were about supporting work which is ongoing. So supporting, for example, I think Lori will tell us about some of the work that’s ongoing that OCHA’s doing around these recommendations already, and then other elements like support to the humanitarian indicator registry, for example, support to building a better response programme, so the many different actors which are involved in continually improving the coordination mechanism.

Now, I’m sure that everyone would love me to spend the rest of the afternoon going in great detail into all six areas, I’m afraid I need to disappoint you, I’m not going to do that. Instead, we’ve taken these a little bit and taken three broad areas to talk about, and what I’ll do is I’ll just introduce the first one, and then we’ll go back to some of our panellists for their reflections on this area. So, the first area where we had a lot of recommendations from the meeting was this area of context and inclusion. And really, this stemmed from a general sense, I think, general consensus across the meeting, that one of the real challenges with the way that the IASC, OCHA-led coordination mechanism has worked up till now is that
it tends to be a kind of cookie cutter, that wherever-, whichever country one is in, and whatever the capacities and the abilities present in that country to conduct coordination, the same structure gets just plonked down, and that this is really a problem. So the broad, sort of, trend of these recommendations was about two things. It was about really looking for, and building on, and supporting, government systems, where they exist, and also civil society systems for coordinating humanitarian response. The other area was about being open and ready to design systems in place, rather than using a default system, being able to craft a coordination system, albeit very quickly, in some cases, that actually was built on the existing-, what existed, and did the job as it needed to be done in that country.

So, the specific-, you can see on the slide here, some of the specific recommendations. One to UNCTs, working with governments, in countries where there was a likelihood of humanitarian crisis, and that was really for the UNCT to be clear from the government what the government coordination mechanism for crises was, in advance. To be clear of the capacities, to be clear of who did what, and to be clear how the international system should articulate with that. At the same time, it was recognised that there would be quite a lot of cases where that government capacity was not present, or there were challenges to government coordination around government engagement in a crisis, and so a second recommendation, largely to OCHA, was that OCHA should develop some sort of tools for rapid assessment of existing coordination mechanisms, and for design of context-specific coordination mechanisms where necessary. There was a sense that the staff college, the UN staff college, which already does a lot of work around training members of HCTs and of country teams, should include training in the use of these tools, and in establishing coordination mechanisms, so that people on the ground knew how to do this in a hurry. And at the same time, there was quite a lot of discussion of the fact that there are, if you like, perverse incentives for activating clusters in L3s. That if you activate a cluster, funding becomes available that, if you had a mechanism which was structured in a different way, might not become available. So there was a recommendation to the IASC emergency directors that they look at these incentives, particularly around the L3s, and look at ways of incentivising diverse approaches, rather than the one-size fits all approach.

In order to support and build the engagement of national civil society in particular, and many HCTs do this already, we heard at the meeting, but all HCTs should be, as a matter of course, reserving spaces for
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national NGOs, or perhaps for national NGO networks, and also finding ways, liaising with the donors to provide funding for national NGOs to participate in coordination mechanisms, and translation where necessary. And then finally, and on a similar note, the tension which exists in any given context between trying to develop the capacity of some civil society organisations as opposed to deliver coordination. Lead-, several colleagues talked about the challenges of trying to do these two things simultaneously, and it not really being clear, at some levels of the coordination system, whether the clusters, for example, were meant to be building capacity, or whether they were meant to me doing coordination with organisations that already had high levels of capacity. And so there were some recommendations about clarification, both globally and at a country level, of membership criteria for HCTs and for clusters. So those were some of the recommendations, some of the key recommendations that participants felt would help us move to a place where our coordination mechanism built on what already existed in country, and fit the requirements of that country. Leah, back to you.

LC: Great, thank you, Paul. The model we’re going to use is to turn to two of each of our panellists after each of the three areas we’re going to cover, and so for this first one, I’m going to turn to Amos first, in a moment, to share any thoughts that he has about these recommendations, based on the discussions in the meeting, as well as since then, any ideas of things, movement, areas that have been worked on, any examples of good practice, or practice that can be built on, and also any challenges to achieving these, or moving forward with these recommendations. So, Amos, we look forward to hearing your thoughts.

AD: Thanks, Leah, and thanks Paul. Hello to everyone who’s out there. I’m going to take a slight tack on this and talk specifically a bit around information sharing and coordination of information, as that was one of the things that Paul touched on a bit, in terms of understanding a bit more of, and it’s specifically in the recommendations, actually 2.1, and it talks about, kind of, understanding, kind of, what exists already prior to-, in the OCHA recommendation there it, you know, talks about some sort of rapid tool. But I just wanted to touch on a specific example of some things that we’ve been involved in, in Asia, and it’s mainly trying to-, we’ve done some work with lots of different agencies to try to better understand the different actors that exist within a country, and kind of do some preparedness work around this, and it’s partly around overall coordination, but it’s mainly focused on information-, understanding what information actually
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exists. And you know, there’s lots of civil society, governments and other types of entities that exist, in many countries, and so we’ve done some basic assessments of, you know, what exists in specific countries, what information that they already have, and is that information, or how could that information be relevant in a response, if something happened? And then how, really how we can actually even access that information, and how it currently is shared. And I think one of the things, certainly that we have learned through those processes is that, frankly, is that starting points matter. So, what’s fascinating in some of the conversations is that you hear, even though you’re talking about similar things, you hear radically different views on what is important, because of the starting points of the individuals, or the organisations that they are with. Especially, you know, when we work with NDMOs but also, kind of, civil society entities in those situations. And weirdly, it almost needs to become more complex, for a while, before you’re going to get through to the other side of complexity, as people say.

I’ll probably leave it at there, and hand it back to Leah, but to me, it’s a small, little example of something that, kind of, has happened post the workshop that World Vision has been involved in, and many other agencies probably represented on the call, in Asia, trying to understand better what actors exist already, and what information that they already have, prior to the disaster even happening, that then can be useful for how we respond. So, Leah, back to you.

LC: Great, thanks so much, and I think it is really helpful to have a, kind of, practical example, so thanks very much for that. I’ll keep it moving right along, and go to Guel to share his thoughts on this one, as well.

GN: Good afternoon, everybody, thank you so much for the opportunity to contribute in this continuous effort to improve the coordination system, to make sure that affected populations see the efficiency and the effectiveness of our contributions. So thank you again, to ALNAP, for that. A quick three thoughts on this. First of all, regarding the practical step to improve coordination. With respect to DRC humanitarian country team, that is one of the most values that we can have, because within the DRC setting, you have donors, you have UN agencies, you have international NGOs. There is room for representatives of national NGOs, as well as representatives of clusters, coordinators. So I think this is a quite good initiative that allows everybody to be able to not only share information, but to move quicker into efforts to develop a response to existing challenges we have. The second initiative that is ongoing is related to OCHA’s role,
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together with national cluster coordinators, to develop tools with respect to DRC multiyear humanitarian
response plan, and for that, the main innovations are one on the multisectoral response, and also the
multisectoral vulnerability tools. So, to go in this sense, we are working together to develop tools that will
enable us to capture information, starting from the […] on the movement of population, for example, and
to be able to analyse and come to conclusions on the most critical needs to be tackled. Because as most of
you know, one of our strategic objectives is to be able to deliver rapid response to people that are affected,
and this, in light of DRC logistical constraints, but also capabilities on the ground. The last point that needs
to be-, what I want to propose, is also the initiative that we are having with government counterparts. We
have a system that exists called Cadre National, the Concertation Humanitaire, bringing together at highest
level, the Prime Minister and the mechanisms co-chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator and the
Minister of Interior, Vice-Prime Minister. So, this system exists, it maybe does not work so properly, but if
this system can be improved, I think it will enable each of the actors to be able to come together in a periodic
manner, not only to analyse, but to go alongside for priorities. So these are some suggestions or ideas of
what we are doing down here in DRC. Thank you.

LC: Great, thanks very much, and good to have started off with several concrete examples of things that
are happening already, that hopefully can be built upon. I’ll turn back to Paul, to hear about the next area
of recommendations from the paper.

PK: Thank you, Leah. So, the next area, where there was a lot of discussion in the meeting, and it also
came up a lot in the background interviews, was a sense that the-, a sense that the coordination system, over
time, this is the coordination system of the clusters, the inter-cluster coordination, the HCT, has got heavier
and heavier, and at the same time, for many of the people on the ground, it’s become, in a way, less and
less relevant. There was a sense that this, this system which really began as a very bottom-up approach to
coordination, really helping independent, autonomous organisations to work better together, had become
something else. A more top-down sort of mechanism, where there was a lot of, sort of, information being
sucked up from the field, and not a lot of benefit for that information, where things which were priorities
for operational work were often seen to be less important than things that were priorities in New York or
Geneva or Brussels, and a general sense that really, in order to-, there was a reset required, to make the
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system support a less directive approach to coordination, one which you might think of as more organisations coordinating with each other, and less organisations being coordinated from above.

Now, this was not-, there were a variety of opinions. Unlike the first area, the context area, there were a variety of opinions across this. It was less unanimous, but it certainly seemed to be a majority behind these recommendations. Recommendations, sort of, from the top to the IASC, to clarify, once again, actually what the meaning of coordination is, you know. It’s interesting how differently this term is understood. Some people see it very much as a command and control term. Some see it much more as a, sort of, voluntary coordination of different organisations coming together, and of course, depending on which of those things you think coordination is, your mechanism is going to be very different, if it’s there to do command and control, or if it’s there to support a more voluntary, bottom-up approach. With that clarification, also a clarification around some elements of the humanitarian programming cycle, which seems, in some cases, or at least seems to be interpreted in some cases, in a very top-down sort of way, where everything is done centrally. The strategy is done centrally, and agencies are meant to contribute to this, and follow this strategy, rather than setting it. So that’s, if you like, the high-level clarification element, but also a lot of things that can be done on the ground. In HCTs, there was a sense that members should be much more active. Agencies that are part of the HCT should be much more active in contributing to the agenda. Bringing things onto the agenda which were not just about the creation of the humanitarian programme cycle products, and various reports that were needed, but also, issues that were going on at that moment that were affecting operations. And so, it was really a call for agencies, for HCTs, to be more open to that, and for agencies to play their part and bring those issues to the table.

Also, there was a sense that HCTs really should develop some sort of light system of follow up on decisions, and the reason for that was that any sort of voluntary coordination mechanism really does depend, as many people said at the meeting, it depends on trust, and good relationships between the people who are coordinating with one another. And one of the biggest trust killers is people saying they will do something, and then it not being clear whether or not it’s been done. So, having a system within the clusters and the HCTs of following up, without punishment, but just sort of, just so that people know that things are getting done that have been agreed, would be very helpful. Overall, there was a sense that, and again, this goes back
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to the humanitarian programme cycle, as far as information goes, the humanitarian programme cycle could do with, perhaps, a bit of a rethink about the level and quantity of information that is required. A lot of people complained about information being extracted to create things like the humanitarian strategy and so on, and that information management was going much more to, sort of, that kind of information than to sharing information about what people were actually doing on the ground. And in order to share information about what people were doing on the ground, there was a sense that the clusters should really spend a little bit of time working out what information their members needed most, and prioritise the collection and analysis of that information, and then that that information could perhaps be used for other purposes, but the focus of the clusters should be on information for use by their members.

So, quite a broad ranging set of recommendations, and as I say, there are more in the report, but all of which are-, taken together, would be sort of reorienting the coordination mechanism from what is increasingly perceived to be a more command and control, top-down approach, to one that was more led by-, coordination led by the participants in the coordination system itself.

LC: Great, thank you, Paul. We’re going to turn now to Lori, to hear her reflections on this area. Again, reflections on the recommendations included in this set as well as the meeting last year, examples of what you’re working on, examples of good practice, and also the challenges to, kind of, achieving these recommendations.

LH: Okay, thank you very much, and thank you for the opportunity to reflect on this particular set of recommendations. It is very much in line with a lot of the feedback that we’re receiving ourselves during field missions, and also through our inter-cluster coordinator colleagues, as well as our cluster colleagues, as well. And I think that, you know, what’s basically happened over the course of the past several years is that we had a situation on the ground whereby we didn’t see country teams really following a very logical sequencing, in terms of joined-up needs assessment and analysis, leading to planning and then having in place proper monitoring systems that would allow for us to demonstrate that the programming that was taking place was very much in line with the planning that had taken place. And so, of course, the whole idea of the humanitarian programme cycle was to bring some consistency and some rigour into how we carried out operations. But I think we also have to be very cognisant of the fact that there is a sense right
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now that the requests for information had become insatiable, and that the coordination really does need to become recalibrated, with a focus on operations, and making sure that when the coordination is taking place, it is taking place for the benefit of its members, so that they can improve its operations, and not, you know, for the benefit of a report that needs to be written for New York. So, this is certainly something that OCHA, and the global clusters, are fully aware of, and we are taking steps, really, to address it right now, I would say, on a couple of different levels.

I mean, basically, one of the things that we have noticed is that there are no standard terms of reference, for example, for inter-cluster coordination groups, or for HCTs, for that matter, and that this year, other colleagues working on the STAIT, this is the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team, have developed standard terms of reference for HCTs that talks about ensuring what each member would bring to the HCT. So establishing a sort of contract, if you want, between members, so that there’s a common understanding of what the HCT should be achieving, and we’re doing the same thing with the global cluster coordinators group for the inter-cluster coordination mechanism. Here, we really are trying to make sure that people understand that the primary purpose of that coordination mechanism is to support the technical and operational level, across clusters. And to really move away from the idea that we do coordination in order to develop products. And I think that is a little bit the sense of what the HPC is perceived to be. However, that isn’t what the HPC is. If you understand what the programme cycle is, it’s really simply a means of making sure everybody has a shared understanding of what the problems are, and they have agreed on the major strategic objectives, and how to deal with the problems. So really, there is an effort to recalibrate this a bit, and to make sure that the coordination mechanism is really much more focused on service delivery. And that means that it’s also much closer to the operations where it’s actually taking place.

In addition to the work around redefining, or better defining what should these coordination mechanisms do, there’s also work that’s being carried out to look at, how do you improve, sort of, that ongoing, joined up analysis that needs to take place at the country level, so that it’s not simply once a year that the clusters come together and produce a document on humanitarian needs assessment, and one plan, but it’s much more of an ongoing process that allows it to be much more flexible, much more focused on the operations, and much more geared towards supporting decision making at the HCT level. And I can talk a little bit
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more about some of the other areas of work that we’re carrying out to support that, but definitely, this message has been well understood, and there’s quite a lot of attention being paid to it, to make sure that coordination is serving, first and foremost, the needs of the operational agencies to deliver assistance. I think I’ll leave it there, and hear from the other colleagues.

LC: Great, thanks Lori, and again, really great to hear, kind of, the energy and movement. I know some of those issues about having, kind of, clarify of what different groups, certainly are things that came up in the research that we’ve done, and so it’s great to hear that there’s forward movement on those. I’m going to turn back to Amos again on this one.

AD: Thanks, Leah, and thanks, Paul, again, for presenting these recommendations. One of the phrases that you used that I really liked, and I had it in my notes, was around the issue of, that often, especially information can be perceived as basically being sucked up into a black hole, and I know that that certainly was, there was a lot of chat about that in some of the groups that I was involved in, in the workshop last June, and it’s a common thing that we hear, whether that’s about the whole system as-, the humanitarian system as a whole, or frankly just within different organisations. Often we get requests for lots of information, but little comes back. And I know that efforts are being made at trying to make a lot more information available, online, which is great, and I think we are definitely moving in the right direction there. I think one of the things that we’ve seen is that we still tend to-, we can do a lot more around trying to make that information more usable. So, rather than a PDF only version, being actually able to get to the data that’s, say, made up a map, or the data that sits behind what is presented in the PDF. Certainly, that’s work that we have been involved in, internally, within our own organisation, but also in-, again, in coordination with other entities. I have to say that one of the pieces that’s not necessarily new in the last nine months or so, since the workshop, but I think it’s really important to highlight the work that the humanitarian data exchange group has been doing. Some of the upcoming work that OCHA’s doing with the datacentre, and a lot of work that Helen Campbell has been leading, on trying to, again, understand, ‘Well, what are the actual needs of people, and how do we bring-, how do we share data across organisations, when often our data is in different formats, which makes the information sharing even that much harder?’
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And you know, so those are some-, I think some real, tangible examples of things that are happening, that have been happening for a while, and hopefully will really improve as we, kind of, move forward.

Some other examples to share is, again, we’ve been involved in a project with some other-, a bunch of other NGOs, some UN colleagues have also been involved, in looking at, at a real basic level, you know, how do you-, how do we share data about the beneficiaries, the people that we are to be helping, and reduce the burden of, you know, constantly having to re-register, get re-registered with every new agency that they happen to be working with, and looking at, is there a way that we can create some sort of shared ID? And I know there’s-, again, there’s other projects like ID2020, kind of, looking at similar types of issues around that, as well. And I think, again, there’s a lot of opportunity here to use technology to help us with our coordination, to make this sharing of information that much easier, or even potentially a default, rather than the way that it currently is, and, but again, I think for me the important piece is that, again, the technology, in many ways, is the easy part. Agreeing on standards is far more difficult, but also far more important. And so, we need to, kind of, keep working at trying to get agreement of how-, what is the data that we need, and what’s the format that we need it in? What are those standards, so that we can make the process that much easier? And not, kind of, get fixated on the technology? Again, I’ll stop there and hand it back to Leah.

LC: Great, thanks, Amos. So, we’ll move on to the third area, and go back to Paul for the third set of recommendations.

PK: Thank you. And I just wanted to underline a couple of things that came to me, from what Lori and Amos were saying there, as well as the last piece, which is that so much of this is not about the big issues, and the, you know, making big sweeping statements. It’s actually about people getting, all of us getting down to it, and addressing some of these quite technical issues, and just doing it. A lot of these kind of technical fixes, taken together, would make very significant improvement, seems to be one of the messages. So it might be time to, kind of, be doing more of that, and it’s great to hear how much is going on. But let us go to the third area.
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The third area, and the last area, to present today, was that there were quite a lot of, and we’ve started to move on to this already, there was quite a lot of discussion at the meeting around the, sort of, four key elements of the coordination system. The humanitarian country team, the inter-cluster coordination mechanisms, whatever they may be, the sectoral clusters, and the subnational coordination mechanisms. These four pieces. And one of the things that seemed to come up a lot was that actually, a lot of time and thought has gone into the clusters, and getting them to work, but some of the other areas, it’s less clear, and I think Lori alluded to this earlier, it’s less clear exactly what they are meant to do, in relation to the other three bits of the system, and it’s not always clear how they are meant to do those things. So, there is a certain amount of cleaning up the system, and clarifying the roles and relationships between those four different parts, and quite a lot of recommendations around those. Some of the key ones were, as you can see, humanitarian country teams should really, both at a global, and at a team level, and at a country level, be very clear about their role, and the role-, the expectations they have of ICC, how they are different, and how they communicate with each other. One of the things that seemed to come up a lot is this idea that HCTs should be strategic, but have not necessarily identified what they mean by strategic, and what is, and what is not within the scope of their discussions.

Secondly, the ICCs, there was a general sense at the meeting, and I think among the interviewees, as well, that there is a very, very important role for ICCs to play, that it is not necessarily around decision making, but it’s around creating the big picture of what’s going on, and making that big picture available to the decision makers in the HCT. And so work around the role of the inter-cluster coordination, particularly this information management role, was an area where there was quite a lot of recommendation. Coordination, though, there was quite a lot of people discussed the, often not very good, relationships between HCTs and inter-cluster coordination, and there were a variety of options put forward for how those two parts of the system should communicate with each other. Then, moving to the other end of the scale, if you like, there was a lot of discussion around subnational coordination, field level coordination, district level coordination, and our partners and colleagues from outside the humanitarian system pointed out how strange it is that many emergency management functions actually begin from the emergency, and the coordination builds up from the site of the emergency. Whereas our system begins from the capital city, generally, and then sort of works down to the emergency from there. And that means that, by the time we
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get to subnational, a lot of the resources have already been spent, and that area where coordination is so important is often overlooked and under resourced. So there was-, and yet we know that, in many places, people have worked out how to do this effectively, and so there was general support to OCHA, and to the global clusters, for the work that they are doing on identifying the different effective models for doing subnational coordination, and also, there was a sense that an IASC working group, or some other group, should build on these models and develop guidance and capacity development packages so that it was possible to set up subnational coordination systems on the ground, when required.

So, overall, I would say that the recommendations coming out of here were not about the clusters, but they were about the two ends, if you like, of the coordination spectrum, greatly strengthening subnational coordination, and greatly clarifying the role of the HCT and the role and relationships of the-, between HCT and inter-cluster coordination. Leah.

LC: Great, thanks again, Paul. On this last area of recommendations, we’re going to first turn back to Guel and hear his thoughts.

GN: Well, it’s two or three points on Paul’s great presentation. Maybe first one, the element of complexification of what is put here. I would, in the context of DRC, add, in addition to what is presented, the presence of the peacekeeping operation mission here, that adds another challenge in the coordination of protection-related humanitarian issues. The second one is on HCT and ICC, at DRC level, as I said, we are working closely with OCHA around the national inter-cluster, to make sure that the necessary technical information gathering is assured, so that when the topic is brought into the humanitarian country team, it will facilitate the strategic role of HCT. We don’t have HCT, national inter-cluster regular meetings, but we have one representative of cluster coordinators in HCT meetings, but we have also the option that on certain topics, HCT meetings are enlarged, to enable the participation of all of the eight cluster coordinators. This is very helpful, in the sense that on specific topics, it [connection failure]

LC: So, just checking-, oh-, we might have Guel back, are you there?

GN: Yes, I’m there.
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LC: Great, we just lost you for a second, so, just keep going from ten seconds ago.

GN: Okay, so, sorry. I was talking about HCT and ICC, saying that in DRC we don’t have regular meetings, but the national inter-cluster is working to support the HCT, one, and secondly, we have a representative of national inter-cluster being a member of the HCT, and the third one is that on specific topics, we have HCT meetings that are open to allow all the eight cluster coordinators to provide directly technical assistance. The last point I am suggesting is on OCHA and clusters-

LC: We might have lost Guel again, so hopefully he comes back in a second, but perhaps in the meantime, while we wait for the connection to re-establish, we can turn over to Lori, and then hopefully when we go back to Guel, his connection will be a bit stronger. So, Lori, I’ll turn over to you for your thoughts on this one.

LH: Okay, thank you, Leah, and I think I’ll pick up on one of the issues that Guel just raised. What we often hear is that humanitarian country teams do not give adequate strategic direction to inter-cluster coordination groups, and the inter-cluster coordination groups do not provide sufficient inter-sectoral analysis to inform decision making in the HCTs. So this relationship that should be in place between, as you pointed out, the strategic and policy level, as well as the more technical and operational level, isn’t always functioning as it should. And so this disconnect, obviously, has implications on how the overall response is carried out. And Guel started to talk about some of the practices that we are starting to see in the field, whereby, for example, there may be sequencing of meetings between the HCT and the inter-cluster, so that the HCT makes some policy or strategic decisions, and then tasks the inter-cluster to react to these, and then the inter-cluster provides feedback back to the HCT, etc. So this relationship is, sort of, established. So the sequencing is important, but also that there are occasional meetings between the HCT and the inter-cluster coordination group, so that there is an opportunity to really review, you know, the overall operations, and to see how both of these groups can be functioning. And here, the role of OCHA is of course critical, because it’s usually the head of office, or the deputy head of office of an OCHA operation that will chair the inter-cluster group, and can really help ensure that the HCT is appraised of the issues in the inter-cluster, and then takes these back to the inter-cluster for action. And this is something that we’re
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very cognisant of, and we are very much working on this. So, that’s one disconnect that really does need to be improved, and we’re looking at how to do that.

Another disconnect is, though, between the subnational level coordination, and the coordination at the national level, and here, we have often heard that the subnational coordination doesn’t feel that its inputs are being taken into account at the national level, and sometimes we also hear that national level coordinators don’t actually go down to the field, and they don’t actually see what’s happening. So there’s a whole series of recommendations, as well, on how to improve that functioning. And certainly, the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration at a subnational level. Dependent on the operation, you don’t necessarily have to have clusters at the subnational level, but you do have to have some form of inter-agency body, it could be an area based coordination model, that would allow for much more joined up planning at the subnational level, and this is something that we don’t see, I would say, enough of. There’s macro level planning, but really, where the operations are really taking place, there isn’t enough convergence of the various sectors, around a general plan of how they’re going to meet these needs, in a specific location. And so that’s also something that I think that we can start to see more work on.

A third area, which I’m also happy to say that there’s some work going on, is the collaborations between clusters. We’ve started a webinar series called Breaking Down Silos, and we, being the Global Cluster Coordinators Group, precisely because we understand that the collaboration between clusters and sectors is absolutely critical for achieving good outcomes. If I just take the example right now of the crises in Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen and South Sudan, the importance of the food, health, WASH and nutrition sectors coming together and working collaboratively, so this inter-cluster, inter-sector collaboration, in order to meet nutritional needs, is something that cannot be overstated. And so I think that we-, I’m happy to report that increasingly at the global level, the clusters are coming together to work specifically on outcomes that require interventions of multiple clusters, so that we start to understand inter-cluster coordination beyond a meeting that takes place once a month, but really, a much more joined up programming.

Maybe two final points. One, I think that we have seen, in multiple contexts, that another problem with coordination is that sometimes it’s too much focus at the national level, and so there’s quite a few recommendations about putting coordination close to where operations are, and making sure that-, that we
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really are very close to the people whose needs are met through the humanitarian operation. And one tool that we have in our arsenal that isn’t used sufficiently are coordination architecture reviews, where we really sit down as country teams, as clusters, and review how coordination is functioning, the linkages between the various coordination groups, and whether or not it’s really serving the operational needs of the partners. This is something that should be mandatory every year, so that these adjustments can be made, and these groups are functioning well together. So, I think I’ll leave it there, maybe you’ve got Guel back on the line, but again, very much agree with the recommendations that were put forth here.

LC: Great, thanks, Lori. I think, in the interest of getting some time for the Q&A part, because we’ve only got half an hour left, we’ll move into the broader Q&A, and hopefully when we turn next to Guel, if there were any lingering thoughts on this last point, he can weave those into his next set of comments. So, for this section of the webinar, we’re going to rely on you, the audience, to share your specific questions with us, and the good news is, we already have quite a few on this growing list beside me. Some were submitted in advance, and others, people have been submitting throughout the webinar, so do feel free to continue to share those, and hopefully, we’ll get to as many as we can. The first question, I’m going to turn to Amos on, and I’ll describe the question a bit. It’s actually, kind of, two questions with a bit of reflection of my own thrown in the middle. So I apologise if you hear me chat for a minute or two here, to get this out.

The first question is around organisations, kind of, coming to coordination meetings perhaps, as a source of, of a place to gather information, but not necessarily sharing information, and someone’s written in and described an example where they saw this, and it kind of reminded me of a discussion that happened at a workshop I organised a few days ago, that was focused on improving urban response, and one of the areas we were talking about is, kind of, different types of assessments for understanding urban environments, and that perhaps there’s lots of different current tools, and like needs assessments, often, different organisations might be conducting, kind of, the same type of activity. And this is something that came up in the coordination work, as well, when we looked at, kind of, to what degree joint assessments and things like that were happening in coordination structures. And one colleague, who was at this urban meeting, kind of commented that it kind of makes sense why organisations don’t share, in the humanitarian sector, you know, the assessments, that’s kind of our R&D, that’s our research and development. So there’s a, kind of,
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an inherent reason not to share, perhaps, some information. And this relates to a second question that came in in advance, so this is why I’ve tied them together, about the kind of underlying competition that we have between organisations in the humanitarian sector, and how we, kind of, resolve that when it comes time for coordination. And I know that competition is one of the factors we identified in the cluster paper as being a, kind of, barrier to coordination overall. And so I’ll combine that all together, and throw that at Amos, and see, based on your experience, what you think the solution is, to kind of address this issue of competition when it comes to wanting to coordinate better.

AD: So that’s a pretty easy question, Leah, thanks for that. I’ll have the answer and sort it all out in less than two minutes. It-, the easy answer to what is the solution is I don’t know, and, but I think that there may be something in looking at what is it that we’re-, where is it that we compete? And yes, obviously we compete as organisations over funding, I think that’s a reality that we all work in. I think around the information, for me what’s really interesting in that space is, I think what we should be competing on is how do we analyse the data and how do we use the data. Not on whether or not we collect it. And so there’s, kind of, data that-, information that we have about-, so, needs assessments about what is, kind of, what do we know about the situation in the disaster? What do we know about the disaster? What do we know about the communities that have been affected? And almost, kind of, have the default of, that we can, that we share that information. But actually, then, just because we have data doesn’t-, you know, there’s a step that’s really needed to turn that data into usable information, and even once you have information, kind of, taking information and turning it into usable knowledge. There are steps involved there. And then even once we have information and knowledge, converting that information and knowledge into, you know, good proposals, and good, kind of, good work, quality implementation, and, you know, ideally, you know, high quality impact, as well, to me, that’s the area that we should be competing on. Not, you know, this, kind of, hording, or you know, unwillingness to share the raw data, let’s call it that for now. You know, and often, I think, again, trying to give some good examples, there are lots of good examples, I think, of people doing this ad hoc. And kind of, informally. And I would love to see us move more into that becoming the default, rather than something that’s rare, or something that’s informal, because then we can-, then, I think, we’re competing on how can we, as organisations, use the information that’s there, and kind of, help the
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people that are affected by the disasters in the best way possible, rather than, you know, trying to hoard the data and keep it away from everyone.

LC: Great, thanks, I think that’s-, yes, absolutely. I think that’s a really great way to, kind of, to think about that one, and hopefully others have examples that they’ve seen, as well, that can be built on. I’m going to keep things moving, and turn to another question, which is quite a big one. I’m going to turn to Paul first on this one, because someone’s requested that you repeat something you said in the introduction, that I think fits under this. So, the question, there’s actually a few questions that have come in that we’ve combined, and it is basically about the degree to which the current coordination system we have now in the clusters, the degree to which that’s, kind of, functional at the moment. So, the question is, has the cluster system failed, either partially or completely, as a humanitarian coordination mechanism and kind of why/why not? And if it has, or if we need to think of alternatives, someone’s also suggested something more like a, kind of, system of directive cooperation, as opposed to coordination, and-, or what other alternatives could there be? So I think, Paul, in your introduction, you talked a little bit about the findings that emerged, that we didn’t intentionally look for, but that came out of the study we did around the clusters and the effectiveness of those. So if you could just, kind of, reiterate that, because someone missed half of that, and any further thoughts you have, and then after that, we’ll turn to Lori, as well, on this one, so, but first, over to you, Paul.

PK: Another good question, thank you, Leah. My personal opinion, and what we got from the research, has the cluster system failed? I’ll answer that one first: no. I think there is a-, I read something, an evaluation which was not of humanitarian action, but of the response to the Victorian bush fires in Australia, and it was looking particularly at coordination between various different firefighting, police and ambulance units, and they said something very interesting, which I think it would be good for us all to bear in mind, when we’re talking about this. It’s an inherently very, very difficult job. In these situations where a lot is unknown, there’s lots of moving parts, we probably, if we’re looking for perfection, organisational perfection, we will be, and continue to be, disappointed. I would suggest that when it comes to any kind of coordination mechanism, in fact, probably any kind of organisation at all, one isn’t really looking for the perfect solution. One is looking for the least bad solution. And have they failed? I think not, because probably, the cluster
system and the broader system is not a million miles away from being the least bad coordination solution that we have. Although there are, as we pointed out, significant challenges, all of those things, though, are amenable. They can all be addressed.

Briefly, why do I-, why would I say that, what’s the evidence for that? Well, firstly, evaluation after evaluation, and interview after interview, suggested that having, particularly the clusters, particularly that element, of coordination, had led to-, globally, although definitely not in each and every case, but globally it had led to fewer gaps, better coverage, and less duplication and overlapping of activities. Then, if one looks at situations where clusters have not been-, the cluster system has not been activated, what one sees is that very often, something very similar to the clusters is activated anyway. So there seems to be a natural response to create a mechanism like this. Thirdly, of course, the formal clusters weren’t brought out of nowhere. The history of the clusters is that it was actually formalisation of something that had been done for some time in many places already, which was these sectoral groups. So, I don’t think they’ve failed. I think there is, however, significant room for improvement, and a lot of the room for improvement is the areas that came up here. First of all, going to the question about directiveness, a command and control mechanism would perhaps be a good idea, in an emergency, perhaps, if it was possible to have command and control. But you don’t have command and control in the humanitarian system, and until such time as all of the humanitarian organisations are merged, there won’t be command and control. So, anything which is aiming for directional command and control appears to be flying in the face of the reality, whether we like that reality or not. Better to try and leverage the reality of diversity and of autonomous organisations, and create, I would suggest, a coordination system on that basis.

Secondly, stop cookie cutting. And already, actually, in reality, this happens a lot. A lot of different countries have done that, and are being quite creative, it just needs to become more part of policy. Thirdly, strengthen subnational and the ICC. With those changes, and I think the subnational, there are real questions as to whether that benefits from being sectoral, or whether it’s better done as an area approach, but with those changes, there is a system which does the job, and which a lot has been invested in.

LC: Great, thanks, Paul. And we’ll turn straight to Lori, as well, for her thoughts on this one, and also, I wonder, Lori, someone’s asked about if there are any plans for future evaluations of the cluster system,
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building on those done in 2010 and earlier, and I wonder given, you know, questions that have come up now and also, you know, that we’ve certainly heard more broadly about, you know, how well the cluster system is doing as a coordination structure, I wonder if you could share any thoughts or plans that there might be for evaluations, or other types of ways to harness learning about what’s working or not in the clusters, while you answer, as well.

LH: Alright. Thank you very much for the question, and as you can imagine, it’s a question that we are obviously quite interested in it. I have to agree with Paul. To say that the cluster system has failed is really far too simplistic, and I also think it’s not even accurate. It’s not-, you know, I’ve heard this a lot, quite frankly. I sort of think that clusters are now an easy target for everything that’s not working in the humanitarian system, and it would really be a pity to throw out the substantial gains that have been made through the cluster system, by simply saying, ‘The clusters have failed, they don’t work.’ Because it’s not really the case. I mean, why was the cluster system set up? It was to provide predictability, and to provide better accountability to humanitarian coordination, and so in that regard, I think that you have seen, obviously, that the cluster system has succeeded in doing what it was set up to do. Where we are seeing problems with the cluster system, the cluster approach, is when it’s not used appropriately, I would say. If we remember why the cluster system was set up, it was to fill gaps, and it was never really intended to replace entirely a national-led coordination mechanism. It was really about filling in gaps, where you didn’t have the capacity on the ground, and unfortunately, I think that in several contexts, you have seen the cluster system deployed en masse, even when perhaps there were solutions that could have been found at a national level, and this is very much perceived as the international system, or the cluster system, coming in to replace national systems rather than reinforcing it, and therefore it is a very heavy, very expensive process.

So, if we were actually to go back to the original intent of the cluster approach, and carry out this really proper context analysis, I think we would see a lot more flexibility being brought into how clusters are used, and we would probably hear a lot less about whether the cluster system is achieving or failing its objectives. I mean, most recently, you know, earlier this week there was a country that had done a proper analysis of where they had gaps in the response, and made a decision to activate only three clusters with the clear understanding that these clusters were to come in and to support the government. And so this is exactly the
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type of context specific coordination that we’re looking for, and appropriate use of the clusters. And of course, the other thing, and we’ve talked about it over the course of the last hour and a half, is that the clusters should be allowed to get on with what they’re supposed to be doing, which is supporting better operational service delivery, and not be very heavily laden, very heavily burdened with a lot of process. We’ve just carried out this terms of reference exercise that I referred earlier to, and it was really quite remarkable. The amount. The expectations that are being placed on individual clusters, as well as the inter-cluster group, and sometimes we’re very aware that the capacity just really isn’t there to do it. So really, a more restrained, a more focused use of the clusters is something that I would say is really required.

Maybe my third point would be that the cluster system was set up in 2005. The situation is evolving. The humanitarian system is evolving. So it’s not a black or white question, a yes or no question, over whether or not the cluster system has failed. I think it’s more a question of how does the cluster system need to evolve now? There’s a scale up in cash based programming, for example, multipurpose cash, that can be used to meet needs at a household level across various sectors. How does that fit into a sectoral based humanitarian response? There’s a lot of emphasis right now on bridging, sort of, the longstanding divide amongst humanitarian and development systems, including coordination. So, how can we find some efficiencies across the clusters, and across the cluster system, so that it’s better able to adapt to the evolving humanitarian situation? And that’s very much, I think, where we are today. Not getting rid of the clusters, but making sure that the cluster system is flexible, and is much better able to be used in a manner that is context specific, and cognisant of the changes that are happening in the humanitarian world.

LC: Great, thanks Lori, I think that’s really clear, and hopefully people can reflect on the kind of successes that they’ve seen in coordination, as well as, perhaps, some of the challenges, and continue, kind of, leveraging those opportunities to improve and evolve, as you suggested. I’m going to try and turn back to Guel, and hopefully his internet connection is looking good. I’m going to put two questions to you, and also ask for any final thoughts, because as we approach the last ten minutes of the webinar, I’ve still got a huge list of questions, so I’m going to try and lump a couple together for you. And they’re around, really, something that’s come up quite a bit about, kind of, the role of local organisations, and so this two-part question, on the one hand, is, what does the participation of local NGOs, specifically, kind of add to
How can we improve humanitarian coordination? How can their participation strengthen coordination? And the second one has come in around what are the reasons that cause some organisations not to be involved in coordination, and perhaps specifically you could focus on local NGOs, and address them together as one. So hopefully, we’ll turn that to Guel. Okay, unfortunately, it doesn’t look like the connection is working, so I know that Amos might be able to add in to that second half of the question, about the reasons that organisations might not be able to get involved with coordination networks, and how those might be overcome. So, we’ll turn to Amos for that question, and also any final thoughts you have, as we come towards the end of the webinar.

AD: Okay, thanks Leah, I’ll keep it quite short. I mean, I think, from my understanding of why do some people not coordinate, I think a lot of that is, is it’s around the incentives, around what-, kind of, what’s the benefit to coordination, and it may seem like a ridiculous question to some people listening, but I think it’s actually an important one. To understand, so, why do we coordinate? What’s-, what do we expect people to get out of it? And that may, again, be a bit of a view that’s, you know, too self-centred, but you know, for a lot of smaller agencies, and even larger agencies, partaking in all of the various different coordination mechanisms that do exist in responses does take a lot of resources, especially human resources, in terms of time. And I think there are people that question the value of that, and whether that is time or money well spent. I’m not going to give a judgement on that, I think, but I think that’s a reason for it, and so we need to kind of consider and look at the incentives behind it.

In terms of final comments, you know, again, for me, kind of, my perspective is quite biased, I guess, in that I look at it from a lot around information, and how do we share information better, and what are the-, and again, a lot of that, to me, is around what are the incentives that do exist? And a lot of that again is, is related to trust, and if we know how our information is going to be used, and the potential of getting information back, I think that’s a way of building that. So it needs to be a two-way street, rather, or at least perceived to be a two-way street. If it’s perceived to be just a, kind of, a constant give, and nothing comes back, you know, it’s certainly not an incentive to do more. I’ll stop there and give it back to Leah.

LC: Great, thanks, Amos. For our last question to Lori, I’m going to put, hopefully an easy one to you, because I think you already, in part, answered it. The question is around insider examples on how to actually contextualise coordination, rather than defaulting to the cookie cutter approach. And we’ve talked about
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dthis a bit, and I know you mentioned just now one example of a country where they’ve deliberately decided to activate three clusters to support the government, and you also mentioned the coordination architecture reviews, so hopefully, you can elaborate just a bit on those examples, and also add any final thoughts that you have for the webinar.

LH:  [connection problem cuts the start of Lori’s sentence] …which we can ensure more specific, more context specific coordination. One of them is a preparedness measure. I do think that it’s critically important to have a good understanding of the coordination systems that exist at a country level, prior to an emergency striking, but also to invest in capacity strengthening for those national structure, so that-, and this is sometimes where we do not see a very coherent approach. There may be a capacity at a ministry level, or through the development actors that are on the ground, but when the emergency strikes, they haven’t yet had enough, I would say, awareness raised of how the coordination works in the humanitarian system, so therefore they’re not really able to lead the response. So not only the capacity mapping, but actually investing in capacity strengthening, and both of those, together, need to be done with the development actors, and not only by humanitarian actors alone. The coordination architecture reviews is an obvious one, although we do not see it systematically used, and one thing I would say about the coordination architecture review is that it should not just be amongst the traditional actors, the UN agencies, but this is the opportunity to bring in the voices of local actors, local civil society, local NGOs, and why not even the affected population? The population that’s affected by the crisis, to really get their feedback on how the coordination structure is working, so that it can be much more adapted to the context, and to the needs of the operational actors, which, our colleague just answered the question, ‘Why don’t people participate in coordination systems?’ Because they’re not getting what they need out of them, and they’re not getting what they need in order to deliver the response that’s required. So, coordination architecture reviews is another-, is another important tool to do. And then I also think that there’s an accountability issue, as well, that the humanitarian country team should be held to account for the types of coordination systems that they put into place, and that they should be required to explain the analysis that goes into place, before they activate international systems and before they, you know, potentially put in place coordination that’s not appropriate to the context. So, some work to do on that side, as well.
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Maybe just some final thoughts, because I know we only have a minute on the webinar, I mean, I think the recommendations that ALNAP have made, and the work that you’ve been doing, has been really, you know, so useful to helping us think through how to improve coordination, you know, it’s very relevant. It’s something that OCHA obviously cannot do by itself, we’re working with the global clusters, but we’d also like to get much more of the viewpoints of the operational actors, the NGOs and others, because ultimately, what we hope is that humanitarian coordination is really serving their needs, so that they can make sure that they have in place the structures that they need for service delivery. So, I think I’ll leave it there, thanks very much, Leah and Paul.

LC: Thanks, Lori, and just before I let you go, can you let us know where people can get more information about the webinar series you mentioned, Breaking Down Silos?

LH: Right, so the webinar series is an initiative of the Global Cluster Coordinator Group to look at various issues related to coordination. We did one this last week which is more general, but in the future, some of the issues that we want to tackle is, for example, how to improve protection results across sectors and through the cluster system. Also, localisation, how do we make sure that coordination is meeting the needs of local actors, as well. Communicating with communities, […], we’re going to be looking at a variety of different issues. There is an email address, but it’s somebody’s last name, and so it might be a little bit challenging. Maybe I can write my email, and if anybody has any questions, they could send it to me right now, I’ll forward it on to the team. And I’m writing it, and if you could make that known to the group, that-, yeah, that’s probably the best way right now.

LC: Thanks, Lori. Yeah, we’ll be sending out an email to everyone at the end, when we have the recording of the webinar available, and we can certainly include any information about that now. I also mentioned someone listening on the webinar, James Shepherd-Baron, has a blog that’s relevant to the question about barriers to engagement to coordination. It’s a bit of a technical link for me to read out, so what we’ll do is send that out after the webinar as well, so that you all have that. I’ll turn, finally, to Paul, both on this question about how to contextualise coordination, because there’s a bit of work that we’ll be doing as a follow up to our paper, and also for any closing comments, recognising that it is just after a minute after the time at the end of the webinar, so just try and keep it brief.
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PK: Thank you, thank you so much to our panellists and to all of you for taking part. This is, as Lori suggested, it is, it’s a team thing, it’s a group endeavour. It’s been wonderful to see Lori and her team, and how much she and the global clusters have been taking lots of ideas and making reality out of them, but it is also something which requires the cluster lead agencies, and all of the partners, the cluster partners, and national civil society, and national disaster management agencies, to engage in, because it is coordination. So, thank you very much for participating in this, and hopefully it’s something that we can all take forward. For our part, at ALNAP, we are looking to continue to support this agenda in any way that research can do. One piece, in particular, is looking into establishing some sort of guiding questions that can be used by HCTs to think about how to, possibly in the architecture reviews, to think about how to establish context sensitive coordination mechanisms, and this is something that we’re going to be speaking to Lori and her colleagues in OCHA and to STAIT about as we go forward. So, watch this space, and thank you very much for joining us today.

LC: Thanks Paul, and thanks again to all of our panellists, as well as to all of our participants who have stayed on the line and contributed your thoughts and questions to the discussion today. I’m going to quickly remind you to please fill out the survey to let us know what you thought about the webinar, and to thank you once again. We will send out a recording and transcript of the webinar in the next couple of weeks, when we have those available, so you can share it with any colleagues who might not have been able to join today, and we’ll definitely include those links to James’s blog and Lori’s webinar series. Thanks again, and hope you have a great rest of your day. Take care.

END.