

Tools and Techniques for Enhancing Donor-Host-country Coordination in Complex Conflict Environments

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BACKGROUND

Driven by concern for the spill-over effect of modern-day conflicts, and their potential impact in states far away, the international community has become increasingly active in these environments. While international assistance was perceived throughout the last decade of the 20th century as primarily ‘humanitarian,’ the increased threat of international terrorism has meant that states with the means to provide assistance in conflict environments have an added incentive to do so. The result has been that most interventions are seeing an increased number and diversity of actors and a higher level of resources on the ground. The complexity of conflict environments is not only a matter of the multi-faceted challenges that encompass political, economic, social, security, and a myriad of other inter-dependant considerations; and the presence of non-state actors and asymmetric tactics employed by certain violence-oriented stakeholders. It includes the increasing number of overall intervening actors with varying agendas and a multitude of activities that often lack central coordination. Consequently, a tool kit of options for maximizing coordination and strategic planning is central to success in stabilization and reconstruction environments.

The analysis in this paper will rely heavily on the author’s experience in Iraq over the past four years, however it will draw on interventions over the past decade and a half to develop a more comprehensive analysis and inform a more widely applicable approach to coordinating international assistance in complex conflict environments.

“WHEN THERE’S A WAR, CERTAIN PEOPLE SHOW UP”¹

Of the various quantitative indicators available to assess the international community’s level of engagement in crisis environments, probably the most indicative is the number of actors or ‘stakeholders’ involved. Personnel-levels can be misleading due to the donors’ and their implementing partners’ practice of seeking to maximize the number of local rather than expatriate staff implementing and supporting their programs. This is done both to minimize the expatriate footprint for political reasons, and to minimize overhead by paying local rather than expatriate salaries as well as the associated insurance and logistical costs of filling positions with people who must be transported to and supported in the theatre of operation.

¹ Conversation with COL. Ben Lovelock, UK Royal Marines, Commander of Multi-National Security & Transitional Command, Iraq [MNSTC-I August 2005].

Finally, the overall consideration of the logistical demands of the operation, both in terms of the number of intended beneficiaries and geographic reach, and the level of infrastructure in-country determine the necessary level of support personnel for an organization to function. Therefore, expatriate staffing levels depend on a number of variables of which the perceived urgency of a stabilization and reconstruction operation is only one. Likewise, the measure of dollars of aid per capita is not a dependable indicator, due to both insufficient and disorganized data on aid flows; and the factors listed above that impact personnel-levels. Thus the most reliable means of evaluating the international community's interest in an intervention is the number of different international stakeholders with a presence on the ground.

After several decades of international assistance, the core set of entities that participate in humanitarian crises and stabilization & reconstruction (S&R) has become fairly consistent. These entities can be grouped into three main categories. First, there are the international organizations (IOs), namely, the United Nations, World Bank, and regional organizations such as NATO, the European Community (EC), the African Union (AU), etc. For the purposes of this paper's analysis, entities such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) are classified under the more general grouping of UN, while the International Organization of Migration (IOM) is counted independently.

Second, donor countries, operating through their respective governmental development agencies (the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID], the U.K. Department for International Development [DFID], the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA], etc.) act as bilateral donors. In addition, donor countries provide assistance through other relevant government agencies in areas such as justice, commerce, and agriculture.

The last group is comprised of "everyone else," meaning non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious and political groups. Some examples include mainstream NGOs such as CARE International, Mercy Corps, and Medicines Sans Frontiers; religiously affiliated organizations such as the United Methodists, and Catholic Relief Services; and political organizations such as the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute. Grouped into 'everyone else' or 'other' are the less usual suspects includes The Holy See (in Afghanistan), and the media and private companies (for example, Nike, in the tsunami response.)

EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLAYING FIELD

With the rapid increase in the threat of terrorism highlighted finally by the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S., the nature of the motivations for international assistance have, to an extent, come full circle. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, international assistance was in many ways optional. Although the Cold War competition suggested that interventionist foreign policy was necessary to self-preservation, the presence of violence waged on citizens in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. on their own soil was absent, and the threat of an attack was limited to the more abstract and physically-removed nuclear threat. Thus engagement abroad could be considered relatively optional and self-serving, rather than humanitarian or an immediate requirement for survival.

One of the United States' most prominent and yet purportedly humble international assistance efforts, the U.S. Peace Corps, was in fact a practical move to help counter the spread of Communism. The 1958 book "The Ugly American"² is said to have influenced President John F. Kennedy's decision to establish the Peace Corps in spring 1961, a concept he began to investigate during his campaign for President in 1960. Soon-to-be President Kennedy's reference to the book in his Cow Palace Speech in San Francisco six days before the November 2, 1960 election, suggests that this linkage exists. Furthermore, in September of that year Vice Presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson called John F. Kennedy to discuss the establishment of "Volunteers for Peace in Humanity," describing the potential program as "a great political asset."³

"The Ugly American" describes the pitfalls of the American diplomatic corps, which was out of touch with the more socially and economically disenfranchised parts of the populations in developing countries such as Southeast Asia. The message taken away by some is that in order to combat the spread of Communism, the U.S.'s presence in developing countries needed to reach these disenfranchised groups by employing revised tactics through a cadre of representatives who would function at the grass-roots level.

Somalia can be seen as the first case in which the United States and its allies intervened for purely humanitarian reasons. Rwanda then followed as a mission that attracted the international community's attention not because of any implications for the developed world, but because of the atrocities that led to a response on moral grounds.

One reason for this new, purer motivation for countries to become involved in humanitarian operations was the increase in visibility of crisis situations, brought into peoples' homes almost real-time by the media. Starvation in Somalia, Serb atrocities in Bosnia, violence and mayhem in Kosovo vividly invaded peoples' homes through their TV sets. This created what Dr. Karin von Hippel calls the "Do Something Effect," inducing a public outcry that prompts a military response that in turn produces a stabilization and reconstruction requirement.⁴ The disaster relief response in the wake of the tsunami in Asia in December 2004 is another example of the "Do Something Effect," one simplified by the fact that it was a natural rather than man-made crisis.

The operations in Afghanistan and Iraq complicate the hypothesis that the international community has seen a move towards more purely-motivated (humanitarian) incentives to intervene. Initially, one argument was that massive acts of terrorism make a military intervention and the associated reconstruction burden the moral as well as practical response to such events as the terrorist attacks; that meeting the practical requirements of self-preservation and the protection of civilian populations targeted by terrorists is a moral obligation. Iraq aside, deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan and their spill-over effects in Pakistan, and the potential for Kosovo to take a negative turn due to the consternation over Kosovo's status, unresolved nearly a decade after the conflict in the former-Yugoslavia and the implications for destabilization in that region, suggest that the international community is returning to regarding intervention in its own interest in these areas. Thus as occurred during the Cold War, the incentives for intervention have returned to

² Eugene Burdick and William J. Lederer, *The Ugly American* (New York: Norton, 1958)

³ John Coyne, "Establishing the Peace Corps." (Occasional Papers About the History of the Peace Corps, November 1999). [<http://peacecorpswriters.org/pages/1999/9911/911pchist.html>].

⁴ Karin Von Hippel, *Democracy by Force, US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 25-6).

have of self-interest, though with a greater sense of urgency due to the recognition of failed states as potential breeding ground for terrorists.

A sampling of the number and distribution of funding sources in interventions over the past decade demonstrates the sharp increase in the number of actors since the threat of terrorism began to compound the sense of urgency presented by stabilization and reconstruction environments. Lebanon currently has a total of 25 funding sources, of which 17 are donor countries and the remainder are NGOs and other international organizations (World Bank, EC, and UN entities). Somalia has 34, 16 of which are donor countries and 14 of which are various UN bodies. Meanwhile, Afghanistan has 104 funding sources, only 41 of which are countries, while 48 are 'other' organizations. As mentioned above, even The Holy See appeared for the first time as a donor in this data sampling.⁵

A Humanitarian and War Project independent study recognizes that, "*In the case of Afghanistan, the strategic donor coordination framework that had been evolving steadily since 1997 among agencies based in Islamabad was overwhelmed by the sudden post-9/11 interest in the country, heightening the difficulties of coordination and of coherence between humanitarian and political activities.*"⁶ Thus the more interest in a conflict stabilization scenario, the more complications arise.

In addition to the number of donor government, IO entities, and 'Other' usual suspects, there are other levels of coordination. These is inter-agency coordination with-in donor governments; civil-military coordination; and the interaction between donor governments grouped as coalitions (both *ad hoc*, or long-standing, as with NATO; the African Union; the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], etc.) and the non-governmental assistance community. Finally, coordination must occur between the assistance community and the host country government once a viable indigenous government is in place.

Given this increasing complexity, effective information exchange is crucial. In general, improved tools to coordinate efforts are greatly needed.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHO SHOWS UP

Some examples of patterns of intervention based on the three categories of international stakeholders suggest several interesting trends. Both security conditions and the international popularity of a crisis impact the distribution of participants among these categories. In the case of the tsunami relief effort and Afghanistan, there are both a much higher number of intervening parties, and a more varied distribution of participant-types. Both these interventions were high profile, the first because of the shock and magnitude of the destruction, the latter because of the relationship of Afghanistan with the attacks of September 11, 2001. In addition, the security conditions in these interventions were not as perilous as those in the remaining examples below. Iraq is remarkable for the absence of

⁵ This assessment is based on reports obtained from the various Donor Assistance Databases developed by Synergy International Systems. For a more comprehensive comparison of interventions and the number of their funding sources, see Appendix C.

⁶ Ian Smillie and Larry Minear, *The Quality of Money: Donor Behavior in Humanitarian Financing, An Independent Study, Humanitarian and War Project*, Somerville, MA: The Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, April 2003.

‘Other’ intervening parties. One reason for this is the need for NGOs and other actors to be aligned under the auspices of a donor government or international organization with the resources to support the logistical requirements that the security conditions in Iraq demand.

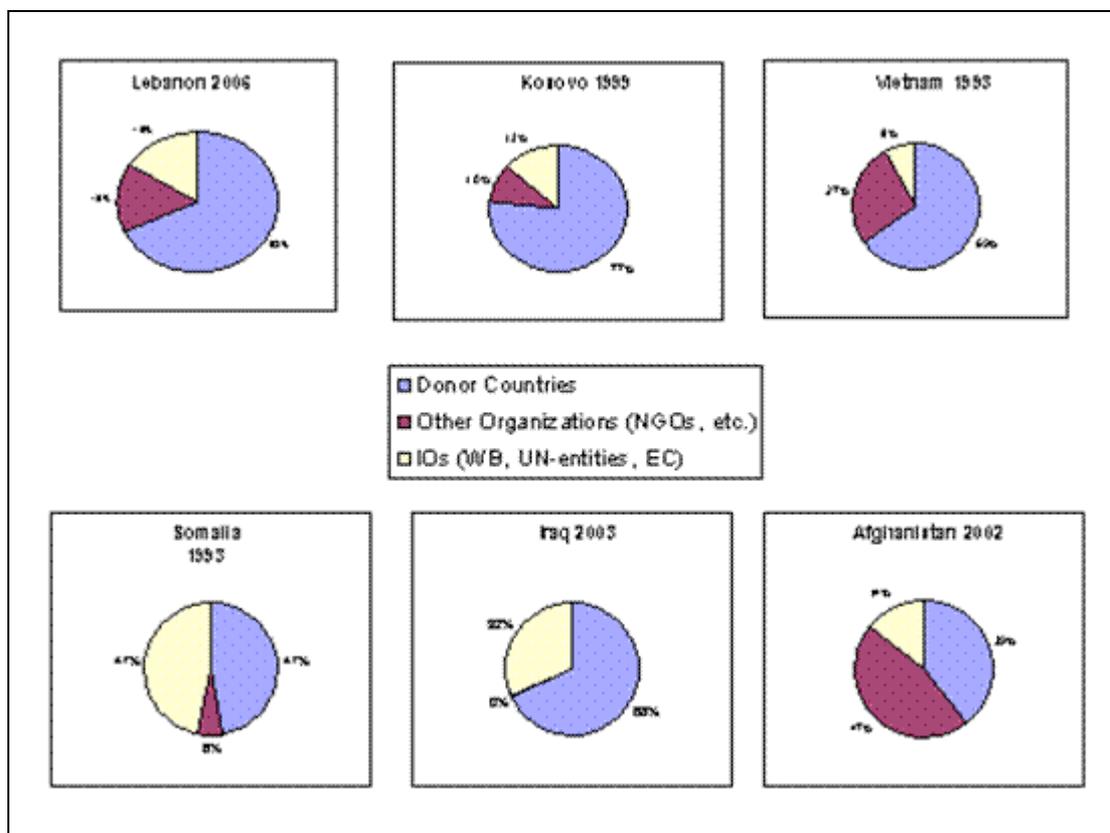


Figure 1: Patterns of Intervention: Donor Countries, Other Organizations and IOs.

In doing this assessment, NGOs and other entities that are contracted to the various donor governments to implement reconstruction and assistance activities are counted as part of that donor government, rather than as independent actors. In 2003 for example, seventeen implementing partners, ranging from Bechtel to NGOs such as Mercy Corps and Save the Children to the IO agency UNICEF, were contracted to USAID in Iraq. In addition to these, NDI and IRI also operated on USAID funding. By the author’s observation, only a handful of ‘Other’ organizations operated in Iraq in 2003 (for example, the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC] and Women for Women International), and these seem to have significantly reduced their presence over the years as security has deteriorated. Some have pulled out altogether. Unfortunately, it is difficult to draw an accurate picture of what independently operating NGOs are present in Iraq. According to its website, as of 2007, the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) membership consists of 80 international NGOs and 200 Iraqi NGOs. However the website also states that “SECURITY CONCERNS PREVENT NCCI TO PROVIDE ANY LIST OF NGOS OPERATING IN IRAQ.”⁷ Not only is a complete list of the NGOs inaccessible, but information on how many of the 80 are acting independently of any donor government or IO is not available. However the author’s experience in Iraq and a survey of donor country government websites suggests that most operate under the auspices and with the funding of one of the two.

⁷ ‘Welcome to the NCCI Website.’ [http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?breve20].

Another factor affecting the intervention picture may be the unpopularity of the war. In the September 8, 2003 Wall Street Journal article “The ‘Passive Saboteurs’ Are Leaving Iraq,” Martin Peretz notes that:

“It is not only the U.N. that is pulling its employees out of Iraq. So are the European Union, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The EU does nothing concretely helpful; its employees can just as well spout off from Brussels. As for the World Bank and the IMF, their lending, such as it is now, can also be done long-distance.

“But it is the departure of NGOs, with their relentless pretense to be the conscience of humanity amidst all its depravity, that truly rankles. And they run the gamut: Oxfam, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children, Swedish Rescue Services, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, Medecins sans Frontieres, Merlin. On Aug. 20, Oxfam said it was staying; by Aug. 28, it was gone. According to the Financial Times, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) venture in Iraq had been one of the world's largest humanitarian operations. Now two-thirds of its foreign staff is gone, and more are on their way. Save the Children claimed on its Web site to have the ‘largest presence in Iraq.’ It has just about vanished.”

He goes on to argue that this ‘exodus’ is not in fact a product of the August 19, 2003 attack on the United Nations compound at the Canal Hotel, but a political gesture. He questions the fear-motivator by pointing out that NGOs and IOs operate in Liberia under conditions that have been more hazardous than those were in Iraq mid-2003, and that in addition, the UN was already considering reducing its level of personnel prior to the attack. He concludes:

“It is for this reason that these professionals actually engage in what one might call passive sabotage in Iraq, a mean-spirited version of what Thorstein Veblen called “the conscientious withdrawal of efficiency.” They do not want the water to flow if the tap is turned by Paul Bremer.”

Thus the implication is that the UN attack was in fact simply an excuse for international organizations to leave (keep in mind, many of those listed above as part of the exodus were operating in Iraq already, prior to the U.S. launched combat operations in March 2003, and therefore their presence in Iraq in the summer of 2003 was in many cases not solely a response to the new reconstruction effort).

“GOOD IDEA, BAD IDEA”

Bad coordination can also lead to bad solutions. Coordination between the donors and the host-country government is crucial. ‘Bad-Idea’ events are often the result of inadequate communication and insufficient information exchange between stakeholders. Often, the result is squandered resources.

This is particularly true in the area of asset transfer, when infrastructure constructed or reconstructed by the assistance community is then handed over to the indigenous government

for operations and maintenance (O&M). One example of the implications of such weak coordination occurred in Iraq, when in 2006, the IRMO Office of Housing and Reconstruction handed off its projects to the Government of Iraq's Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction, which until the transfer was unaware that many of the assets existed. The result was that the Ministry had not budgeted for the quantity of asphalt that would be required to finish and/or maintain the facilities, roads, and bridges it had inherited because it had not been aware of the existence of many of the IRMO projects during its 2006 budget process in the fall of 2005.⁸

Thus the need for transparency is not only a question of political correctness, but a practical need if donors and their implementing partners are truly committed to working themselves out of a job. One complaint voiced by Iraqi officials is that the NGOs are hard to control, thus while donor countries may sign onto such documents as the International Compact with Iraq, which includes commitment to information sharing and acknowledgement of the country's National Development Strategy, implementing organizations –which in most cases are NGOs contracted under a donor government's assistance agency, such as USAID, DFID, or CIDA- accountability for reporting on projects becomes further complicated and information obscure when the donor government does not engage in sufficient quality control of reporting.

A macro-level example of the negative impact of poorly thought-out stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Iraq is the Commission on Public Integrity (CPI). The CPI was intended to conduct oversight of the Government of Iraq (GoI) as part of the effort to address anti-corruption. Instead, the CPI became an impediment to budget execution, as a result of the use of the CPI by certain members to falsely point fingers at GoI officials, in order to remove them from their positions, and replace them with the CPI officials' own allies. Consequently, GoI officials were leery of actually spending the funds that were already allocated with-in the National Budget. Thus \$9 million of the 2005 Iraq National Budget went unspent.⁹

REVIEW OF TOOLS

“WHAT’S IN A NAME?”

This paper examines the variety of already existing mechanisms for coordination. The fact that there are so many efforts to promote aid coordination indicates that the importance of maximizing efficiency through information exchange and strategic planning that allows individual actors and the indigenous governments to make decisions in a transparent environment is a widely accepted concept in the abstract. The difficulties arise when these mechanisms are put into practice. Too often, problems arise from the over-eagerness of the

⁸ This information is based on anecdotal evidence provided by the U.S.'s Iraq Reconstruction and Management Office (IRMO) Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Planning, Gaither Martin, during the UNDP-hosted conference on the DAD in Amman, Jordan, September 2006.

⁹ This figure is according to the Iraq Minister of Finance Baqer al-Zubaidi in a February 13, 2007 editorial in the newspaper Azzaman, in which the author paraphrases the Minister as saying that Iraqi ministries “could not spend most of the money earmarked for their projects in 2005.” Meanwhile, the cause of this budget execution bottleneck is controversial.

international community to establish tools for coordination, to the point that their sheer number renders them counter-productive. At times, in our efforts to ‘herd the cats,’ the international community gives rise to more rather than fewer complicators.¹⁰

Coordination and information exchange tools fall into three categories, simply put: ‘Documents,’ ‘Bodies,’ and Technical Tools such as information management systems. Forums such as working groups (WGs), steering committees, task forces, boards, roundtables, and consultative groups are examples of the various bodies established in crisis environments. Documents include international agreements or “compacts;” the development of international standards and terms of reference to clarify and make consistent the ‘rules of engagement’ for donor intervention in particular, donors’ and their implementing partners’ obligations to the host country; the role of working groups and other similar forums (task forces; steering committees; etc.). Lastly, technical tools refer to databases and the use of the internet for information exchange, to include wikis and networks modeled along the lines of virtual communities.

DOCUMENTS

Despite the attempt of the international community to institutionalize coordination and planning in a series of agreements, these attempts have been insufficient due to the absence of true leverage for enforcing them. To begin with, donors have a record of not fulfilling their monetary pledges of assistance made at donor conferences, shortcoming that occurs with impunity. Documents such the Paris Declaration and the various International Compacts contain standards on how international assistance is implemented. The Paris Declaration (February 28-March 2, 2005) established 12 indicators against which to measure aid effectiveness, however they are vague at best and do not include mechanisms to make donors accountable to meeting the standards laid out in the document. While donors ‘commit’ to standards relating to Monitoring and Evaluation Implementation, to “Strengthen Public Financial Management Capacity and finally, in a section under “Harmonisation,” state that “Donors [commit to] implement[ing] common arrangements and simplify procedures,” there continue to be many gaps in practice.¹¹

The International Compact with Iraq (ICI) includes the section “6.5 Improved Donor Coordination and Implementation” which refers to “elaborating mutual commitments, monitoring progress against their implementation and evaluating performance through the Joint Monitoring Process.” In Section 6.6, “Financing Mechanisms and IRFFI [Iraq Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq],”¹² it states “Stronger emphasis will be placed on IRFFI being responsive to government of Iraq direction.” Yet there is nothing to indicate how this will be enforced.

¹⁰ Reference to “Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World,” ed.s Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela R. Aall, United States Institute of Peace. (Washington, D.C., 1999). The book addresses multiparty mediation, however the term “herding cats” has come to represent the wider array of coordination issues that arise in complex contingency operations.

¹¹ <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>.

¹² IRFFI refers to funds from donors that are managed in two different funds, the UN Development Group (UNDG) Iraq Trust Fund, and the World Bank Trust Fund. These are separate from the bi-lateral funds, and in theory, are not earmarked by the contributing donors.

One of the greatest shortcomings of these agreements is that though they state that international stakeholders are responsible for transparency and reporting requirements, in practice, there is no accountability. The fact that these documents do not specify standard operating procedures (SOPs) makes it more difficult to impress upon stakeholders their failure to comply with their obligations. Without some sort of leverage to enforce reporting requirements, information sharing does not occur. One of the ways to encourage information sharing when it is a largely voluntary endeavor is to establish and disseminate clear SOPs, and to make the reporting process as easy as possible. The implications of labor-intensive reporting procedures will be discussed in greater detail in relation to the technical tools.

BODIES

The need for efficient mechanisms for coordination and communication also affects the utility of various physical forums for information exchange. One of the dilemmas of coordination is achieving an appropriate balance between time spent in meetings of the various mechanisms that are the ‘bodies’ or forums, and that spent on actual project implementation and internal reporting requirements. For example, in Iraq, the international community has established multiple coordination bodies under the International Compact with Iraq (ICI). Figure 2, taken from the ICI Implementation Plan, illustrates the multiple bodies associated with the ICI:

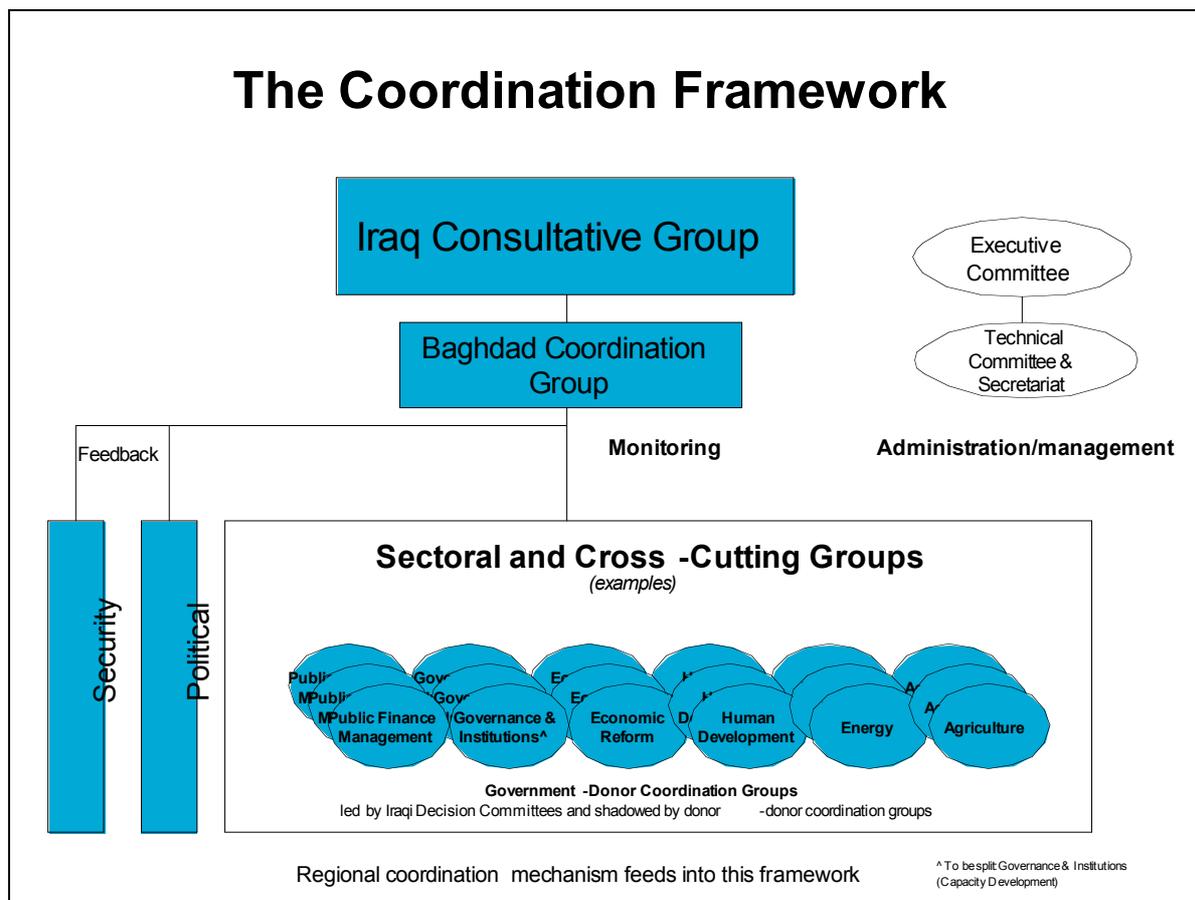


Figure 2: The Coordination Framework.

In addition, with-in each one of these Sectoral Groups is the following organizational map (Figure 3).

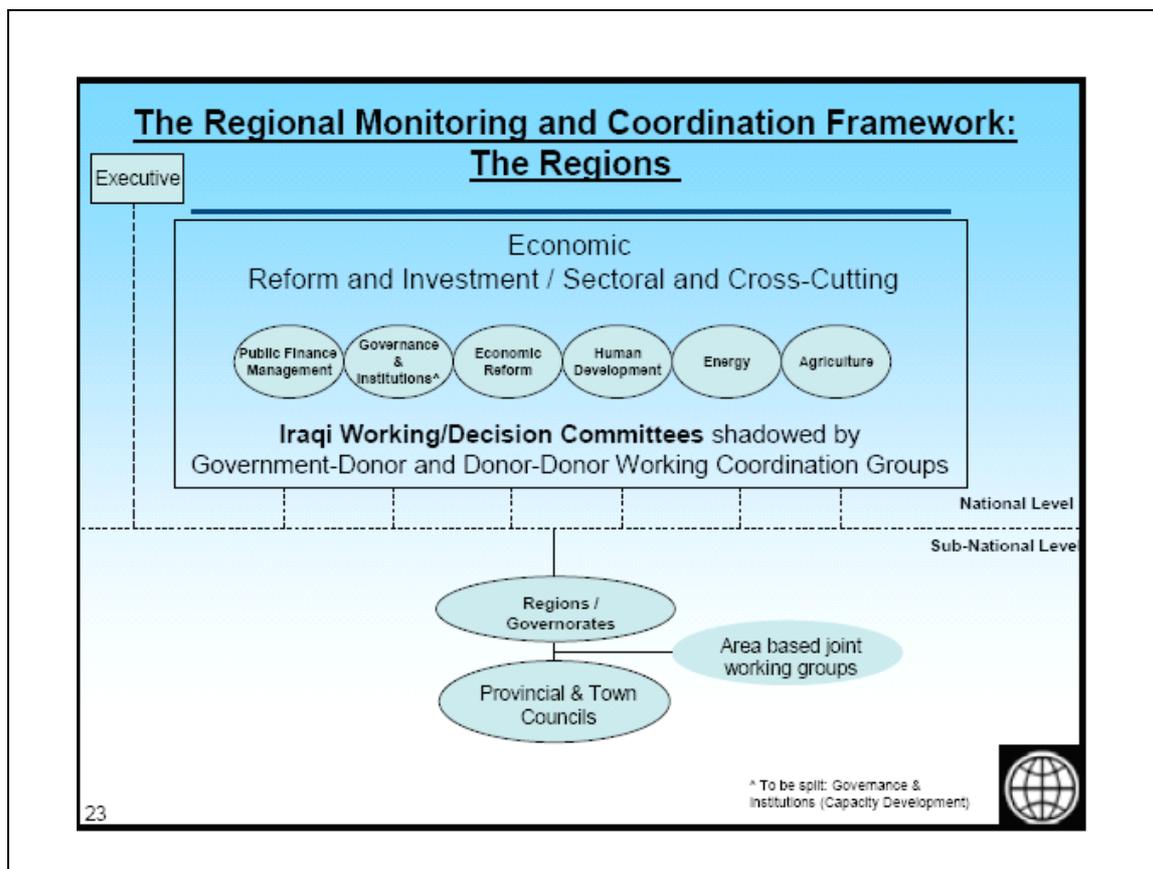


Figure 3: The Regional Monitoring and Coordination Framework: The Regions.

Likewise in Afghanistan, certain topics cross-cut sectors (see Figure 4).¹³ This cross-cutting element is not always recognized by donors nor reflected in how they structure their programs. The result has been duplication of effort. In Iraq, the Anti-Corruption WG, Rule of Law WG, and Budget Execution WG have over-lapping scopes. This means that the relevant ministry representatives from the GoI and subject-matter experts from the assistance community are needed at all three of these weekly meetings, as well as at a number of the stove-piped sectors. As cross-cutting issues, anti-corruption and budget execution impact every sector (oil, water, electricity, health, etc.).

Furthermore, at times there are parallel structures; the U.S. has its own Anti-corruption weekly meeting in addition to the Sectoral WG established by the ICI. In the case of capacity development, another cross-cutting topic, there is the ICI Capacity Development Working Group (CDWG), but then also a US-only Joint Task Force for Capacity Development (JTF-CD).

Another dilemma posed by multiple bodies and a plethora of meetings is the issue of security. Meetings require the personnel on the ground to travel to the same place, usually a local Civil Military Operation Center (CMOC) or as they were known in Iraq, the Humanitarians Assistance Coordination Centers (HACCs). In addition, many crisis

¹³ www.ands.gov.af.

environments have a Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) as a resource for information including maps, and as a forum for meetings independent of the military, which hosts the CMOCs and HACCs. The more often travel is required, the greater the chance that staff may be targeted. In addition, congregations of expatriate and local assistance workers provide attractive targets to spoilers. Finally, as is a major problem in Iraq, gatherings put local staff at risk by emphasizing their ‘collaboration’ with international intervening parties.

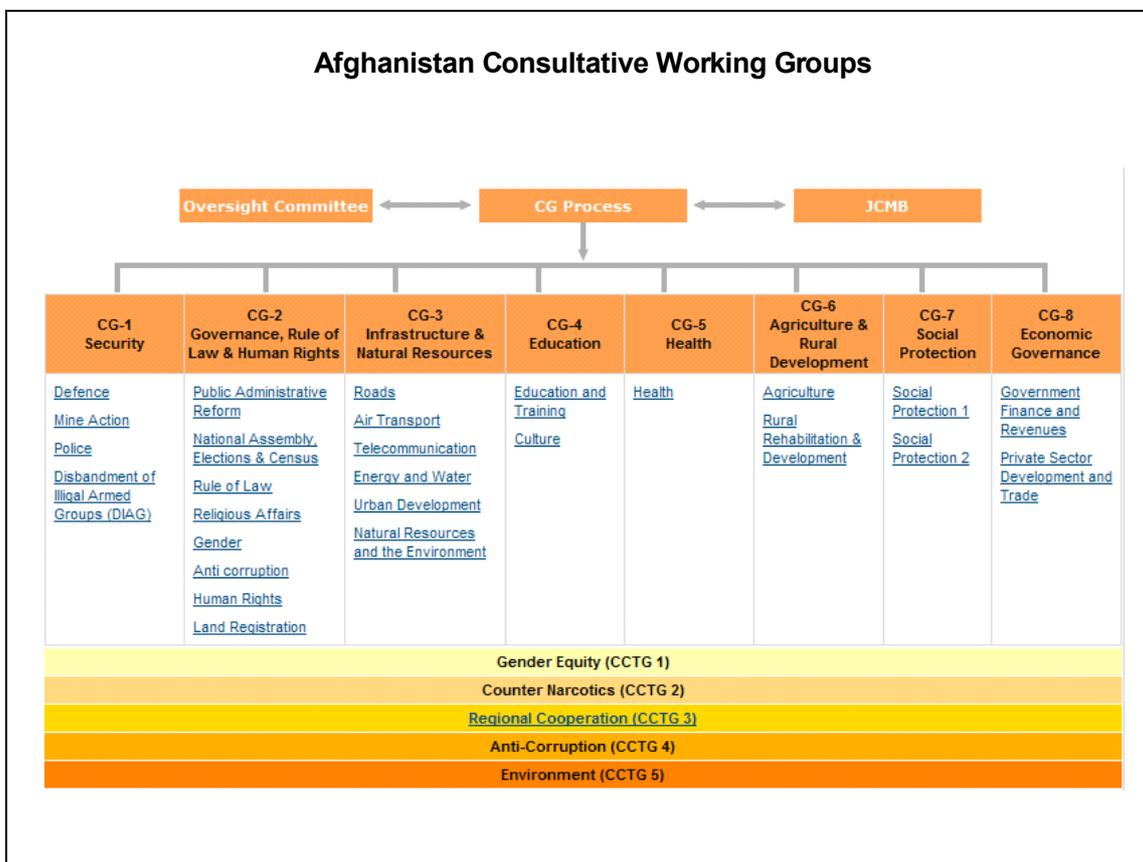


Figure 4: Afghanistan Consultative Working Groups.

Lastly, the establishment of various bodies that require meetings run into the challenges of continuity and consistency. The high rate of turnover of personnel has meant that there is a lack of historical knowledge of the progress of these bodies and how they arrived at various decisions. Personal relationships also play a large role in S&R because as mentioned above, cooperation has yet to be institutionalized and stories of success stem largely from individual willingness to share information and invest time and effort in coordinated strategy. Thus each time there is turnover in personnel, group members must start at square one.

Consequently, additional means for information exchange are required. Technical tools have the ability to compensate for many of the shortcomings identified in relation to documents and bodies. Technical tools, properly developed, can make reporting easier, by enabling implementing partners to submit data online or, in the case of central databases, electronically in spreadsheets or by accessing databases online. Not only is this potentially easier and less time-consuming, thereby mitigating the disincentive for implementing partners to share information in the absence of accountability, but it removes the need to spend the time and take the risks of travel to meetings.

TECHNICAL TOOLS

Databases can be pivotal resources for enhancing coordination by mitigating the challenges posed by the security environment in stabilization and reconstruction environments, the increased number of stakeholders, and because they facilitate standardization of data collection and analysis. Not only does insecurity limit freedom-of-movement of on-the-ground personnel and local counterparts; it also means that many implementing partners and donor governments operate with “skeleton-crew” personnel-levels in-country.

At the same time there is an increased number of stakeholders,¹⁴ there is also a greater volume of project data. Information management systems allow a tool for consistent data collection and measurement regarding compliance with internationally recognized methodologies and standards such as the MDG, Paris Declaration; the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting Codes (CRS) Purpose Codes, and the Government Financial Statistics tracked by the Financial Management Information System (FMIS) that the IMF promotes.

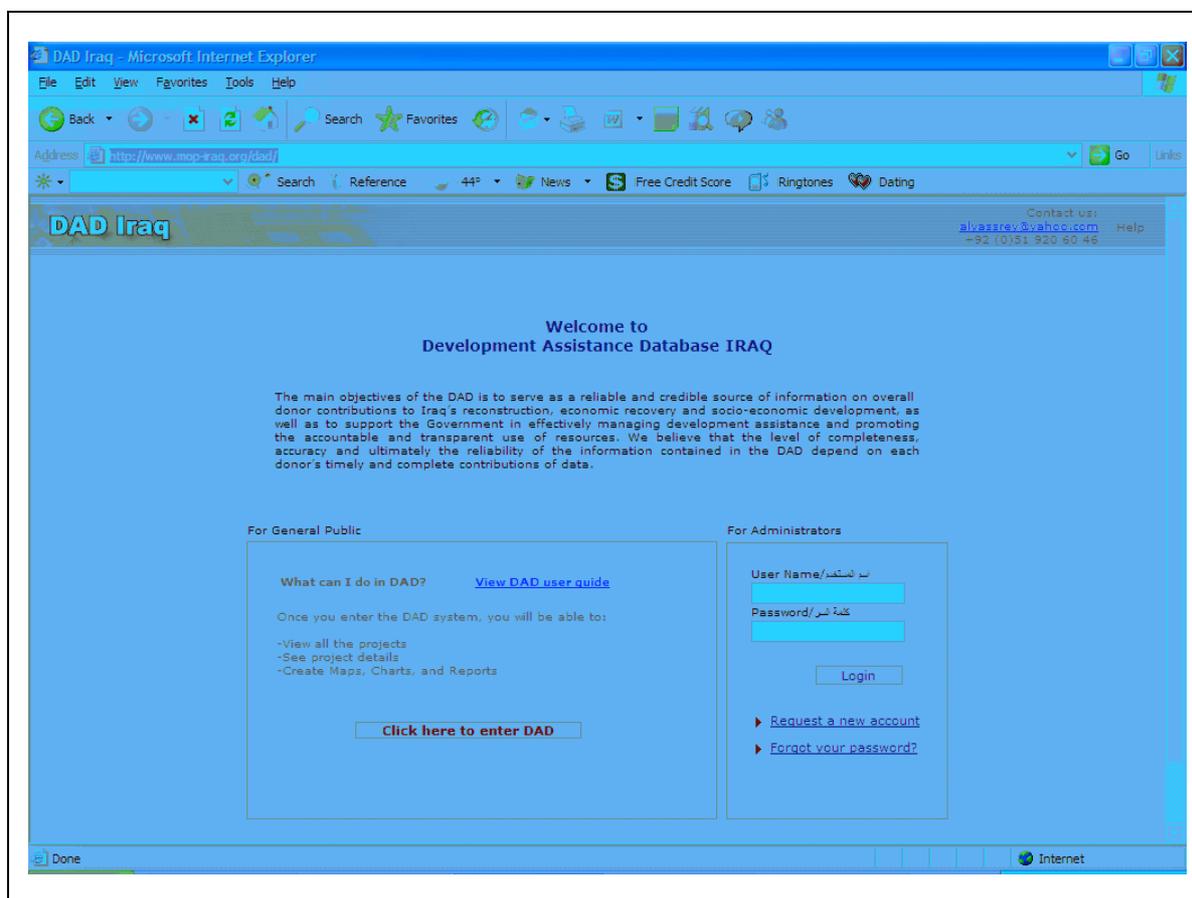


Figure 5: Welcome to the Development Assistance Database Iraq.

¹⁴ ‘Stakeholders,’ ‘actors,’ and ‘implementing partners’ refer to the organizations and governments represented; this is distinct from personnel levels, because each organization or government may have only a few direct representatives on the ground.

One of the most widely used information management systems in S&R conflict environments is the Development Assistance Database (DAD) (Figure 5). In most cases, it is open-access, with contributors having a password to enable them to directly submit and update their own data. An alternative means of reporting is for project implementers to submit spreadsheets to the team who maintain the DAD.

The first DAD was a PC system developed for Russia in 1996 by the G7 Support Implementation Group. It was called the Donor Assistance Database, and tracked 20,000 projects over the period from 1991-2001. Originally, it was not web-based but after they were stood up in the Newly Independent States (NIS), the DAD was further developed to be accessible via web portals. It has now been implemented in more than 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.

In July 2005, Synergy Systems International signed a contract with the UN Development Program (UNDP) to make the DAD the ‘official’ tool for donor coordination, by establishing that a country office that needs the DAD software need not go through a bidding process (Figure 6). Currently, the average cost of setting up the database is about \$90,000.¹⁵ Documentation puts previous DAD installations at \$50,000-\$75,000. In Iraq, the DAD has cost considerably more, since the transition from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) data-collection effort to an Iraqi-owned one has required much more regarding both standing up the technology, and training the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation (MoPDC) officials to maintain the system.

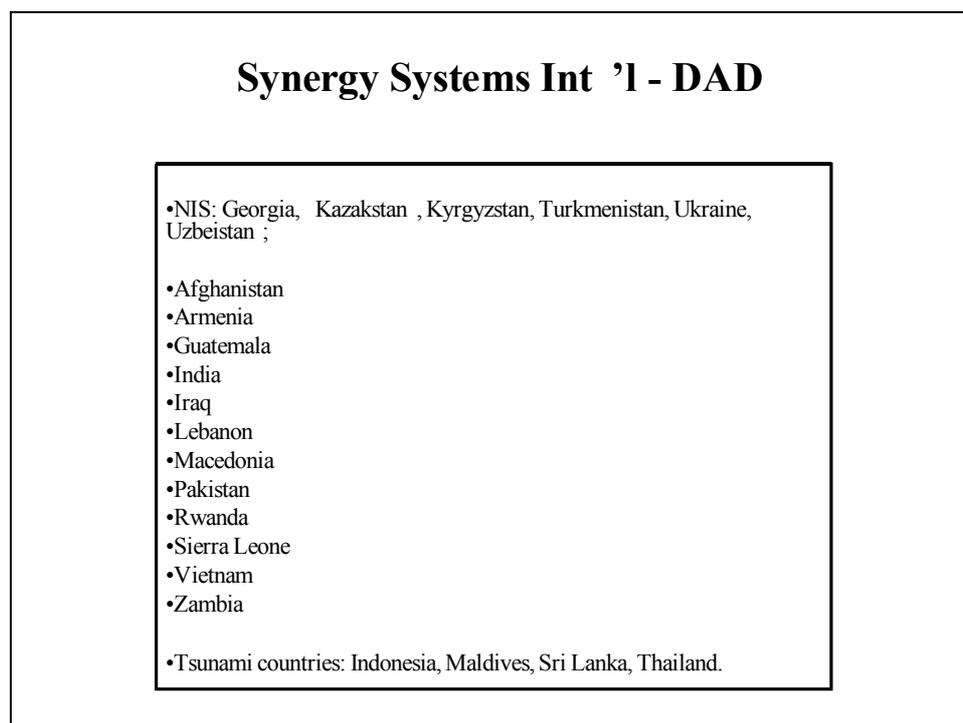


Figure 6: Synergy Systems International Development Assistance Database.

In Afghanistan in August 2005, the DAD was renamed the *Development Assistance Database*, to reflect its expanded mission to include Public Investment Projects (PIP), in other

¹⁵ The \$90K figure is based on the author’s conversation with Synergy representatives.

words, those projects being funded by the indigenous governments' National Accounts. In the case of the Tsunami DAD, the individual DADs for each affected country feed two larger regional DADs, one for public sector-funded (i.e. governments, NGOs and IOs), and one for assistance funded by the private sector.

The DAD is intended to incorporate the Paris Declaration commitments regarding reporting to recipient governments, and to work with-in the parameters of the Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and MDG indicators. It lives with-in different ministries in different countries. In the case of Iraq, the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation has ownership; in other countries, it resides in the Ministry of Finance.

A cautionary noted on technical tools is that they should not be so ambitious as to become unusable. When the various stakeholders loose faith in the reliability of data or find that the data collection requirements are overwhelming; or the technical tool is so sophisticated as to be esoteric, the tendency is to revert to their own information management systems and analytical tools. Revision of a well-known cliché captures the true problem: "Keep it simple smarty-pants." The burgeoning of technical capabilities related to data collection, analysis, and dissemination has led to an inclination to use it to its fullest capacity even when the situation may not demand it. In order to increase the number of members of the user community –whether this be a 'publisher' (one who contributes information) or a 'puller,' (one who uses it), in addition to minimizing data requirements, database owners should seek to eliminate unnecessary 'bells and whistles.' It should also be remembered that we should not work for technology, technology should work for us.

In many cases, databases and websites which include links that purportedly enable access to a variety of databases, maps, and contact lists, are not fully functional nor are they always up-to-date. The various DADs have data that is as old as 15 years, despite the humanitarian effort being an ongoing effort. The UNDP has set up a database referred to as the "Project Matrix," hosted on the website of the Somalia Aid Coordination Body (SACB).¹⁶ The database, established in 1994 at the 4th Coordination Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia, was meant to serve as an information management and coordination tool in the same way as the DAD. However as of spring 2007, during the research on this paper, the database was not usable. Information on the donors was still being compiled; and none of the features was functioning, therefore, this database is still not operational, 14 years after the start of the conflict and 13 years after the database was created. The SACB seems to be a forgotten effort; by the final writing of this paper in fall 2007, the website could no longer be found. In the case of Liberia's National Information Management Center (NIMAC) site,¹⁷ it is not as clearly navigable as the various DADs, which are fairly standardized across recipient countries, and many of the links to meta data and related information are not functioning. Therefore, databases should not be overly ambitious if they are to be manageable efforts to establish and maintain, both in terms of technical issues, and the quality of the data.

Keeping it simple also means honestly assessing whether elaborate, proprietary software is the necessary platform on which to build a tailored information management system. Commercial Off-the-Shelf (COTS) software is usually sufficient for creating the repository for data and performing the needed analyses. First, COTS is less expensive at the time of

¹⁶ Former SACB website: <http://www.somaliasupportsecretariat.info/matrix/matrix.htm>.

¹⁷ <http://www.nimacliberia.org>.

initial purchase and licensing, and because proprietary software requires more sophisticated and therefore more highly-paid programmers and developers. In addition, use of proprietary software presents the potential for the customer of the developer/programmer team to become hostage to them. Expert programmers of proprietary software are rarer (and therefore more expensive) than those who program COTS platforms. Because mainstream courses and instruction manuals do not exist, organizations become dependant on these highly-paid IT experts for the development and maintenance of databases using proprietary software.

Finally, the esoteric nature of proprietary software has information-sharing implications. It may limit the community of people skilled enough to manipulate the database, or who have access to the database due to legalities. If the software cannot be shared with a party without purchase of a license, that party may be prevented from merging a database with their own internal system except via the fairly rudimentary process of a “data-dump” via Excel spreadsheet or some other compatible software.

In addition to the technical issues associated with overly ambitious databases, information systems should be realistic about how much data can actually be collected and entered into the database fields. Where reporting requirements are excessive, the tendency of organizations to keep data up-to-date, particularly where reporting is voluntary or the ‘obligation’ to share information is not enforceable, the tendency is that even when goodwill exists to be cooperative players in an S&R intervention, the more pressing imperatives of actual project implementation and internal reporting requirements take precedence.

The ownership issue also results in the existence of multiple information management systems associated with a particular complex intervention. The question arises, when seeking to create *the* central database that is the receptacle for *all* information related to the intervention, in other words, the Knowledge Base, who owns it, and under what circumstances? In the case of the Iraq DAD, the database began with the U.S. Government, became a collaborative effort between the U.S. and UNDP; from 2004-5, officials from the Iraq Ministry of Planning began to play an increasing role in the development of the database. The DAD now officially resides with the MoPDC but continues to require UNDP financial support and from the developer, Vienna, Virginia-based Synergy International Systems, technical support.

The ownership issue has also meant duplication of effort. Not only does Afghanistan have the DAD, but also the Afghanistan Information Management System (www.aims.org/af). AIMS is considered to be Afghanistan’s version of the HIC, and therefore serves the same community that is meant to be using the DAD. Sudan uses the Sudan Information Gateway, which is managed by Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Sudan also has the Sudan Information Gateway (www.unsudanig.org), which is a portal for information exchange. International assistance practitioners who may have become familiar with the DAD in other interventions, will have to familiarize themselves with new information management systems in Sudan.¹⁸ Furthermore, with multiple information management tools, the questions arises: are they all of equal integrity? Finally, reinventing the wheel not only duplicates effort in terms of development of the multiple systems, but it has implications for the reporting burden on implementers.

¹⁸ For a more comprehensive list of web-based portals and databases related to stabilization and reconstruction assistance, see the Appendices of “Wikis, Webs, and Networks: Creating Connections for Conflict-Prone Settings.” by Rebecca Linder (CSIS, October 2006).

Faced with the reality that one central, commonly-used system will not be the primary system used by all actors, development of a 'knowledge map' is a means of providing transparency on *what* information is *where*.

One final caveat on the utility of databases is the issue of classification. Because the community of actors in an intervention is multilateral, and both military and civilian, not all parties can be privy to all information. However work-arounds should be sought, to maximize the amount of information that can be assembled in one place.

Wikis and virtual social networks modeled along the lines of MySpace and Facebook are additional technical tools available for information exchange between stakeholders. While content would be less controlled than in the case of information systems such as the DAD, they can act as useful forums to replace some of the functions that the many working groups and other bodies attempt to address. In addition, one argument made in defense of quality control on wikis is that (a) they can be monitored by the host team, and (b) their open-access nature and the fact that users can edit information can sometimes make wikis a self-correcting information source.¹⁹

TOOL KIT

No single approach among these tools is the answer. A combination of documents, bodies, and technical tools must be applied to each complex intervention. The degree to which the unique characteristics of a particular intervention have implications for which set of tools is the most appropriate means that development of a single template applicable to every contingency is not possible. In order to integrate these tools, the international community has begun to engage in developing and war-gaming processes. One of the values of establishing a flexible systems approach and testing it in advance through war-games and similar exercises is to avoid completely ad-hoc arrangements which often develop into over-reaction to unexpected coordination challenges.

Figure 7 is part of the Iraq Implementation Plan. It illustrates the complications and high demand for information exchange when the various bodies and procedures are actually implemented

One example of an endeavor to improve what processes are put in place upon deployment to a stabilization and reconstruction mission is Multi-national Experiment (MNE). It is run by the United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM), J-5 (Joint Innovation and Experimentation).

The effort is in its 5th year, and an exercise to test the process, MNE-5 will take place in February 2008. In its early years, MNE focused on inter-agency coordination with-in the U.S. Government although MNE-1 (2001) included Australia, Germany, and the U.K. It then moved on to incorporate wider multi-national coordination by adding Canada, and NATO (MNE-2, 2003); France then joined MNE-3. In 2006, MNE-4 began to incorporate the

¹⁹ For more on how the internet can enhance performance in S&R environments, see "Wikis, Webs, and Networks: Creating Connections for Conflict-Prone Settings." By Rebecca Linder, CSIS, October 2006.

Effects-Based Approach to Operations (EBAO). MNE-5 expands to include international non-governmental players, namely, the IOs and NGOs.

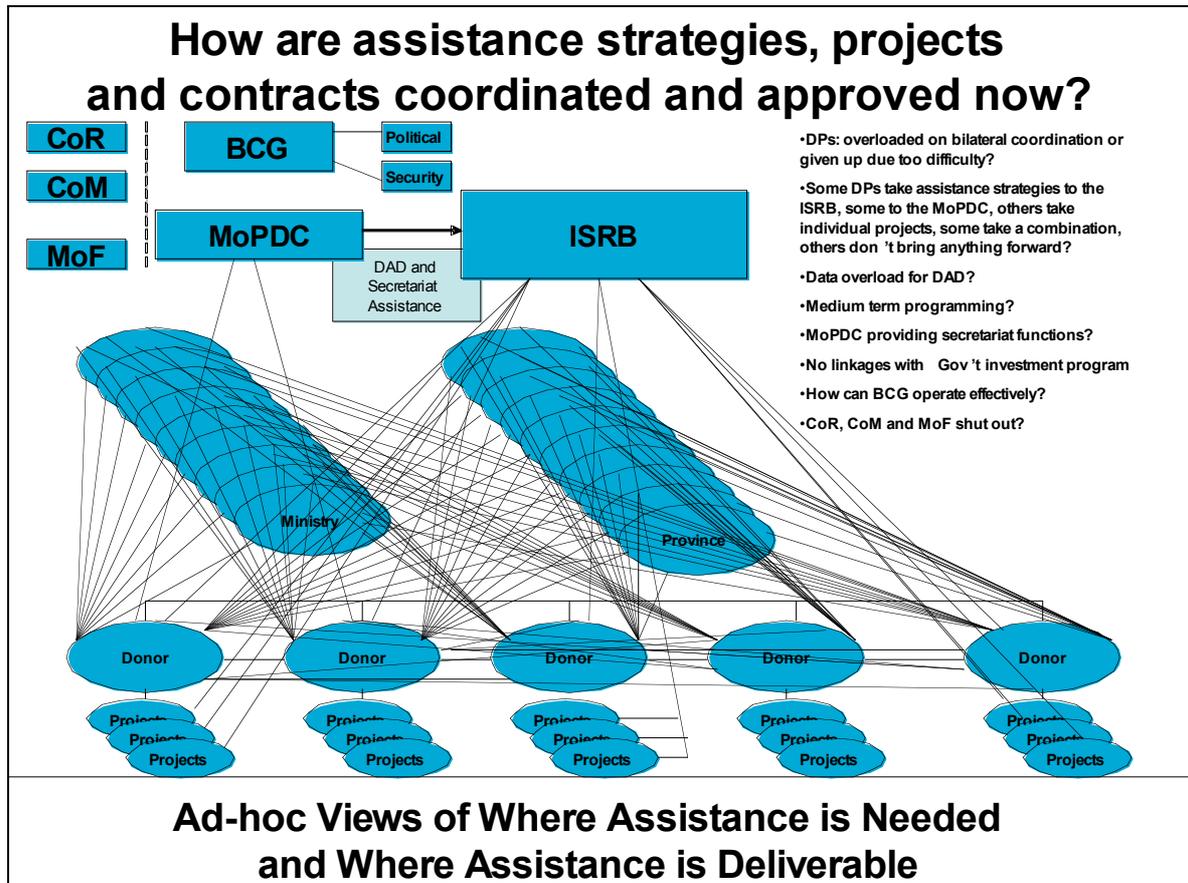


Figure 7: Ad-hoc Views of Where Assistance is Needed and Where Assistance is Deliverable.

MNE focuses significant attention on Knowledge Support (KS), an important element of EBAO. Different participating governments have slightly varying KS models. Knowledge Support in general is considered to have three main components: Knowledge Management (KM), Information Management (IM), and Content Management (CM). Systems to manage KS are a central component of MNE's approach to improving stabilization and reconstruction efforts with-in the principles of National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD-44).²⁰

Another endeavor that may be incorporated into the MNE process is the Shared Information Framework and Technology (SHIFT). SHIFT is meant to serve an administrative function, as 'police' to monitor whether or not the MNE environment is being properly used, however it is not meant to moderate users, which would skew the MNE's authenticity as a true test of the experiment.

²⁰ Based on a June 4, 2007 presentation by Ambassador Herbst [Director of the U.S. State Department Office of Coordination for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS)] these principles are: (1) 'whole of effort,' (2) joint deliberate planning & assessments, (3) coherent linkages of organizations and structure; (4) lessons-learned; apply best practices and (4) increased civilian capacity.

SHIFT also recognizes the potential for other, web-based tools to contribute to coordination in S&R environments. SHIFT plans to establish SHIFTPEDIA as a means of presenting information. It would function like a wiki.

CONCLUSION

Information exchange is a crucial component of coordination in stabilization and reconstruction. Whether opportunities for diverse actors to interface occur in physical forums or through virtual forums, connectivity increases effectiveness. However tools, processes, and systems should be kept simple so that the “Do Something” sentiment does not produce a “Do everything” reaction and end up as a “Do nothing” reality during implementation of an intervention.

APPENDIX: ACRONYMS

AU	African Union.
CDWG	Capacity Development Working Group.
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency.
CIME	Cooperative Implementation Management and Evaluation.
CMOC	Civil-Military Operations Center.
COTS	Commercial Off-the-Shelf.
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority.
CPI	Commission on Public Integrity.
CRS	Creditor Reporting Codes.
DAC	Development Assistance Committee.
DAD	Development Assistance Database.
DFID	Department for International Development.
EBA	Effects Based Assessment.
EBAO	Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO = EBP, EBE, EBA, & KS).
EBE	Effects Based Execution.
EBO	Effects Based Operations.
EBP	Effects Based Planning.
EC	European Community.
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States.
EU	European Union.
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization.
FMIS	Financial Management Information System.
GoI	Government of Iraq.
HIC	Humanitarian Information Center.
ICI	International Compact with Iraq.
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross.
ILO	International Labor Organization.
IM	Information Management.
IO	International Organization.
IOM	International Organization of Migration.
IRFFI	Iraq Reconstruction Fund for Iraq.

IRI	International Republican Institute.
IRMO	Iraq Reconstruction and Management Office.
J-9	Civil-Military Operations Staff section, US Joint Forces Command.
JTF-CD	Joint Task Force for Capacity Development.
KB	Knowledge Base.
KD	Knowledge Development.
KI	Knowledge Integration.
KS	Knowledge Support.
KV	Knowledge Vision.
MDG	Millenium Development Goals.
MNE	Multi-national Experiment.
MNISP	Multinational Interagency Strategic Planning.
MoPDC	Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation.
MPICE	Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments.
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontiers.
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq.
NDI	National Democratic Institute.
NGO	Non-governmental Organization.
NIMAC	National Information Management Center.
NIS	Newly Independent States.
NSPD	National Security Presidential Directorate.
O&M	Operations & Maintenance.
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
PIP	Public Investment Project.
S&R	Stabilization and Reconstruction.
SACB	Somalia Aid Coordination Body.
SHIFT	Shared Information Framework and Technology.
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures.
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development.
USJFCOM	U.S. Joint Forces Command.
WG	Working Group.