Improving Coordination

Information Sharing → Collaboration → Joint-strategic planning

Disaster Preparedness Training Programme

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Table of Contents

Background and uses

This module is one of nine modules that have been prepared by INTERWORKS for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Disaster Preparedness office in Geneva. This module can be used as for independent study, as a reference guide on the subject, and to provide participants at a workshop training event on this topic. It is intended to accompany the trainer's notes on this topic. Their intended use is global, and they are written for generalists, planners and professionals with disaster preparedness and/or emergency response responsibilities both within the Federation and in the National Societies. Non-governmental organisations interested in disaster preparedness and preparedness planning, government emergency commissions, local disaster committees and civil defence training units may also find these modules useful.

This material can be used as:
- A general reference material on disaster preparedness
- Training and workshop modules and trainer's guides
- An orientation to disaster preparedness for Delegates and NS officers
- A guide for assessing or planning disaster preparedness capabilities

All nine of these modules are revised and updated versions of modules that were initially developed for the Central Asia IFRC Disaster Preparedness Regional Delegation DP project in 1998. This project resulted from recommendations and training needs expressed by Central Asian National Society and Emergency Commission staff attending the IFRC sponsored regional disaster preparedness conference held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from June 24-26, 1996.

The overall aim of the Central Asia DP training project was to support the National Societies in further developing their own structures for preparedness in conjunction with those of the Emergency Committees, Ministries and Civil Defence organisations in each of the five countries in the region. To date, disaster preparedness in the region has been typified by highly response oriented, well maintained and trained Civil Defence organisations; and largely unprepared, and untrained local populations and non-governmental organisations. Disaster management has traditionally consisted of preparedness for efficient and centralised emergency response, not the development of community-based or localised preparedness capacity. The Central Asia DP training programme was one attempt to change this emphasis and was proposed as a starting point from which revisions, and modifications for use on a country-by-country basis were expected and welcomed.

This material is based on a "multi-hazard" approach, and is typically applicable to preparedness in all of the hazard situations represented. However, the specific country context of the readers and trainees will necessitate a focus on the hazard types that are most applicable to their situation. While the modules and accompanying trainer's notes are written for use at national level workshops, individuals with training responsibilities are encouraged to use and adapt the material for use at more local regions and towns.

The nine disaster preparedness modules and trainer's notes

Disaster Preparedness	Preparedness Planning	Risk Reduction
Increasing Community Disaster Awareness	Disaster Needs Assessment	Disaster Information and Reporting
Improving Coordination	Improving Basic Training Skills	Project Planning

Acknowledgements

These nine modules and their accompanying trainer's notes were prepared for the International Federation by INTERWORKS, a consulting group with disaster management training and consulting experience in over 60 countries worldwide. Review and critique of these modules were provided by a team of Central Asian disaster management specialists, the disaster preparedness officers of five Central Asia National Societies, the Federation disaster preparedness staff in Geneva and delegates in Central Asia, the Caribbean and East Africa.

The following documents served as references for the compilation and writing of this particular module:

1. **Interagency Coordination,** conference paper prepared for the Emergency Settlements Conference, sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Disaster Management Center and InterWorks, 1996.

2. **Creating Coordination Among Organisations**, by Dennis Hamilton, ILO Training Centre, Turin, Italy, 1995.

3. **Coordination Among International Organisations in Complex Emergencies**, draft training module prepared for the Complex Emergency Training Initiative and the Disaster Management Training Programme, by James Good and Paul Thompson, InterWorks. 1997.

Improving Coordination

Aim and audience

This training module focuses on providing officers of National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and other agencies with a basis for better understanding the pre-conditions and actions that facilitate coordination. This module is appropriate for IFRC delegates and National Society staff who are interested in and responsible for increasing collaboration and strengthening partnerships with other organisations.

Main points

- Advantages of coordination
- Preconditions to coordination
- Spectrum of activities that can be improved through coordination
- Barriers to coordination
- Actions and strategies which facilitate coordination
- Examples of National Society coordination policies, activities and mechanisms

1.   Introduction to coordination

1.1   Need for coordination

No organisation working alone can address the magnitude or the complexity of the needs associated with disaster preparedness and disaster response. In addition to the Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC), there are government agencies, public service institutions (police, firemen, health workers), community groups such as farmers or youth groups, civic and religious organisations, NGOs, businesses, local leaders and local groups with roles and responsibilities in disaster preparedness and response. Effective coordination among these various responders is critical to successful preparation and response to disasters. At its best, coordination can eliminate gaps and duplication in service, determine an appropriate division of responsibility and establish a framework for information sharing, policy agreements, program collaboration and joint planning.

1.2   Red Cross as a government auxiliary

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the government to ensure the safety and preparedness of its citizenry, and to coordinate the work of the various organisations involved in disaster response. The role of the Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGOs in a disaster is to act as auxiliaries to government action.

For these reasons, Red Cross/Red Crescent officials need to liase with the proper authorities in order to ensure that the work they will be undertaking is within the framework of government disaster preparedness plans and that the RC society does not duplicate government efforts. At

the national level, the liaison should, in principle, be handled through the Secretary General's office. The day-to-day programme coordination, however, is often delegated to the heads of the appropriate department, for example, the disaster preparedness programme officer or the disaster response programme officer.

The RC National Society and local branches should also identify opportunities to collaborate and coordinate with NGOs working within the country, or within their locale, respectively. This may be as simple as periodic meetings to exchange disaster and programme activity information. Sometimes it may also mean working together to plan and implement a disaster preparedness awareness campaign.

Finally, it is critical that the National Society and its branch societies at the district (or state) and local community level clarify their respective roles and responsibilities in disaster preparedness and response. This includes establishing necessary communication and coordination procedures between the different levels.

1.2   Defining coordination

Coordination means working together in a logical way toward some common result or goal. The operational definition of coordination, however, varies among personnel from different agencies. Definitions of coordination range from centralised coordination to simple information sharing between organisations.

Between these two opposing viewpoints is a definition of coordination in which agencies have the will, instruments and trained personnel for effective collaboration with each other. Perhaps the greatest challenge to coordination is the inherent difficulty of identifying a common purpose and approach among agencies whose mandates, methods, resources and systems are diverse. The incentive to coordinate comes from experiences where the lack of coordination results in conflicts and misunderstanding.

1.3   Advantages of coordination

Disasters are characterised by overwhelming needs, competing priorities, destroyed or damaged communication and infrastructure, a rapid influx of humanitarian assistance organisations and an outburst of mutual aid from local citizens and highly stressed local governmental and non-governmental institutions. In these environments, coordination takes extra effort, time, resources and commitment. Some fear, rightly at times, that it will add another layer of bureaucratic decision making that will

> **What is coordination?** Coordination of independent organizations is undertaken for the purpose of eliminating fragmentation, gaps and duplication in services. Coordination can also mean harmonizing separate disaster actions or activities and clarifying roles and responsibilities. Methods for ensuring coordination include written memoranda of understanding, or other similar agreements. In coordinated systems, independent actors share information and work with a common purpose. Coordination may be either voluntary or mandated, and carried out through formal or informal agreements.

hinder their ability to maneuver. Coordination when well done, however, has many positive benefits, that can far outweigh many of its disadvantages. These benefits include:

Improved efficiency, cost-effectiveness and speed of response
When organisations begin the process of sharing information either before an emergency occurs or quickly thereafter, coordination can improve the efficiency and speed of disaster response. This will occur when organisations have mechanisms in place to quickly assess the needs of the affected population and when organisations have shared with each other the resources that each brings to the response. These types of coordination activities enable decisions to be taken quickly.

A framework for strategic decision making on issues of common concern
Through a coordinating mechanism, all response organisations have the opportunity to identify the needs of the emergency and to participate in an organised strategic planning process.

A unified strategic approach to disaster response
Discrepancies between agencies over standards of assistance, linking relief with longer-term rehabilitation efforts and differences in conceptual approaches to response all represent challenges to achieving a harmonised response. Disaster response, which is not coordinated and does not try to harmonise standards and approaches, leads to differential treatment of the population. This can lead to competition for resources, conflict and distrust—all of which exacerbate the problems of the disaster-affected population.

Elimination of gaps and duplication of services in meeting the needs of the affected populations
If organisations are successful in coordinating their activities as described in the first three benefits above, there should be neither gaps nor duplication in services and resources to meet the needs of the affected population.

Appropriate division of responsibilities based on an organisation's comparative advantage

In an emergency there will be clarity about some of the operations of all agencies. Their comparative advantages and spheres of operation are known and accepted by all. On the other hand, the areas of operation of many agencies will likely overlap in terms of mandate, resources, geographic location or capabilities. Therefore, one of the key challenges is determining who will take on a task when two or more organisations are ready and able to do it.

At their best, coordinated activities that consider the comparative advantages of responding organisations result in humane, neutral, and impartial assistance; in increased management effectiveness; in a shared vision of the best possible outcomes for a given situation; in a seamless approach to service delivery; and in donor confidence resulting in sufficient resources to achieve the desired outcomes.

1.4   Preconditions to coordination

The chances of achieving effective coordination are greatly enhanced when several preconditions have been met. Coordination is a process that works best when it is
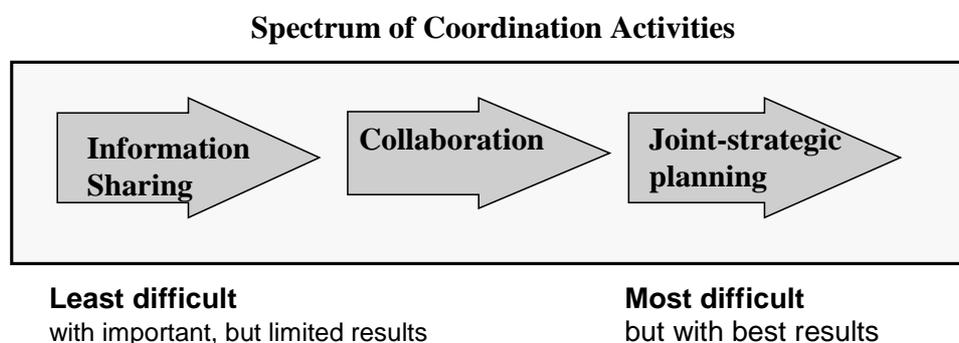
- participatory
- impartial
- transparent

Coordination becomes viable when agencies actively *participate* in the coordination process. Organisations need to participate in deciding the policies, procedures, strategies and plans that will affect their operations. Participants must act to secure and maintain the confidence of others, thereby creating an atmosphere of respect and good will. The possibility of participating in relevant decision making is one way to build confidence. The coordination mechanism should not be used as a way to subordinate or gain advantage over other agencies. A coordinated approach toward achieving a common goal will work best when areas of authority and responsibility are clearly defined.

Coordination should advocate the principle of *impartiality*, i.e. the provision of relief solely on the basis of actual needs, not on the objectives of a particular agency. This impartiality should be maintained in both pre- and post-disaster periods. Coordination requires trust and trust requires *transparency*—the willing flow of information and open decision making processes. The real motives of decision making should be clear to all participants and acceptable to the affected population.

2.   The spectrum of coordination activities

Coordination, as illustrated in the diagram below, can be described as a spectrum of activities, starting with simple information sharing leading to collaboration and then to joint development of plans and programs. The activities discussed below are loosely listed in an ascending level of sophistication. Although each activity can lay the foundation for successive ones, the given order should not be taken too literally since some activities can be performed simultaneously and, in some cases, less difficult activities are bypassed in favour of higher priority, more challenging ones.

Spectrum of Coordination Activities

Information Sharing   **Collaboration**   **Joint-strategic planning**

Least difficult
with important, but limited results

Most difficult
but with best results

2.1   Information sharing

Lack of understanding or simple miscommunication often prevent organisations from realising that they share many interests, especially when it comes to the welfare of their beneficiaries. Often, they may desire the same end-goal and may share many philosophical and conceptual approaches.

Sharing and exchange of information is one of the basic coordination activities. Agencies can share their objectives, mutual interests, strengths and limitations, viewpoints and many other things including:

- the roles and responsibilities of each agency and specific resources they have for disaster preparedness and response
- geographical area of operation
- purpose of planned activities
- priority needs and gaps in assistance
- issues related to the situation or context (e.g. political situation, security, local conditions)
- other information characterising the input of each agency

2.1.1   Identifying gaps and overlaps in disaster/emergency assistance

In disaster response, it is inevitable that gaps in assistance will occur in both the relief and rehabilitation efforts. This can be especially problematic when distribution systems are inaccessible to the affected population, where the local population is out of favour with the authorities, or where the population is difficult to locate as in situations where families and individuals are dispersed throughout an urban environment. One way that organisations can minimise these gaps and overlaps, however, is to meet, discuss and negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement on each organisation's (1) geographical area of operation, (2) individual services or contribution to a joint service package and (3) the specific target group or set of clients with whom each will work.

> **Post-earthquake coordination**
> **Naryn oblast, Kyrgyzstan**
>
> A small earthquake in January 1997 affected the Kosh-Debe settlement in Naryn oblast of Kyrgyzstan (population of approximately 3,000). There were no deaths or injuries, but the situation was complicated by downed power supply lines—the main heating supply for the community.
>
> - The Ministry for Emergencies and Civil Defense worked on restoration of the power supply and repair of destroyed housing and social structures
>
> - A private firm headed by a native of the settlement paid for the cost and delivery of coal
>
> - The regional Red Crescent Society Committee arranged for the delivery of foodstuffs and clothes according to the framework of the humanitarian assistance programme
>
> These examples illustrate that even small-scale activities in disaster preparedness and response demand coordination.

The Gap Identification Chart, shown below, is an example of a tool that can be created for a disaster or emergency situation. It lists the required actions in the left column of a matrix and the responding agencies across the top. By identifying which agency is responsible for each action, you can identify both gaps and overlaps in assistance.

Sample gap identification chart for a flood-prone area

Activities	Agencies					
	Local government	Civil defence / Government Emergency management	Meteorological service	Irrigation system	Population	NS
Preparedness						
Site selection, building protective constructions	+		+	+		
Maintenance of protective constructions				+		
Flood prognosis			+	+		
Forecast tracking and public awareness system	+	+	+	+		
Personnel and population training		+				+
Response						+
Population evacuation	+	+				
Restoration of protective constructions	+			+		
Shelter and loans	+	+				
Aid distribution	+	+				+

2.1.2   Warning systems

Early warning systems are integral to, but distinct from, preparedness planning. Early warning is necessary prior to the onset of a disaster, and also an essential part of ongoing operations.

Warning systems, including monitoring and control, are costly and target one type of hazard or specific group of hazards. Over the years, experience has shown, that one agency, however powerful it may be in terms of authority and resources, cannot set up and maintain a comprehensive warning system alone. The only effective solution is to monitor the situation by using and coordinating the resources and warning systems of many agencies.

2.2   Collaboration

Collaboration is more than simply sharing and exchanging information. Collaboration means that agencies assess the situation together, share ideas on how to overcome the problem and initiate practical responses together.

2.2.1   Identify affected population groups and jointly assess their potential capacities and needs.

In some cases it is difficult to reach consensus on which population group needs assistance. Coordinated identification of the target group is a priority task. Joint assessment of needs and available resources should result in a decreased need for duplicative follow-up activities. In addition, joint assessment should provide the basis for a more complete picture of the situation and therefore serve as the basis for a comprehensive strategic plan for assistance operations. Joint needs assessments are also more considerate of the affected population—imagine being a

member of the affected population who is asked the same questions multiple times by representatives of different agencies.

2.2.2 Coordination of assistance standards

Before a joint assessment field assessment is conducted, the logistics of conducting the assessment and the standards that will be used should be agreed upon by all on the assessment team and assessment tasks should be assigned accordingly. The minimum humanitarian standards in disaster response developed by the Sphere project can assist organisations with prioritising information collection needs and planning an appropriate level of response. [1] The sectors included in the Sphere project include:

- Water supply and sanitation

- Nutrition

- Food aid

- Shelter and site planning

- Health services

In addition to these sectors, assessment teams may want to collect information on personal and household needs; agricultural, economic and infrastructure damage; and the political and security situation.

2.2.3 Mobilisation of relief resources

Resource mobilisation is central to mounting a disaster relief effort. A well-coordinated appeal is often more attractive to potential donors and often becomes the basis for making a decision on providing funds or other materials.

In assessing the resources required for a disaster preparedness plan, the following elements should be considered:
- housing
- medical supplies
- food
- communication systems
- transport and organisation of deliveries
- availability of people to render urgent assistance (relief)
- equipment and sanitation

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[1] The entire manual, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, can be downloaded from the **The Sphere Project** website http://www.sphereproject.org, or can be ordered through Oxfam publishing @ Bournemouth Book Centre (BEBC), PO Box 1496, Parkstone, Dorset BH12 3YD, Tel: +44 (0) 1202 712933, Fax: +44 (0) 1202 712930. The Sphere Project can be contacted at: P.O. Box 372, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland Tel: (41 22) 730 4501 Fax: (41 22) 730 4905.

The types of needs that must be addressed depend on the types of disasters anticipated. Such needs should be made explicit, and should cover all aspects of disaster relief and recovery. Specific arrangements should be established whereby each party agrees to secure certain goods and services as required.

2.2.4 Joint training

The implementation of emergency relief operations requires a diverse set of skills and expertise. Too often, the people responding have little formal training in emergency management; and often, past mistakes are repeated. When organisations have similar training needs, sponsoring joint-training programs is one way to share the cost. In addition, joint-trainings are a way to improve trust and relations between response organisations. Disaster response drills involving several organisations help identify strengths and weaknesses in the response system, and build the communication and personal links required to make coordination work during an emergency.

> **Central Asia**
> **Disaster Preparedness Training**
>
> From 1997-1999, National Society officers with disaster preparedness responsibilities and their government counterparts attended a series of disaster preparedness meetings and workshops designed to build DP knowledge and expertise, plan the development of disaster preparedness programmes at the country level and increase government support and recognition of National

2.3 Joint strategic planning and programming

Planning is a fundamental component of disaster management. It is essential before the onset of an emergency, and even more so, once it has begun. Failure to foresee an emergency and anticipate changes in the relief efforts, such as in the location and number of affected persons, has too often resulted in needless suffering and deaths.

2.3.1 Disaster preparedness and planning

The process of developing common approaches in advance, sharing information, developing joint plans, and taking coordinated preparedness actions will greatly improve relief efforts. By coordinating disaster preparedness activities:

1. the efficiency of harmonised use of resources is applied to an entire operation
2. all organisations can benefit from the planning skills and experience of the most talented members of the team—a resource base significantly larger than afforded by individual organisations
3. team building occurs before the emergency and strengthens the ability of organisations to work together in emergency situations

2.3.2 Share personnel

For some organisations, including National Societies, responding to major emergencies may require additional experts. As a rule, bringing in highly qualified experts can be costly. This cost can be defrayed if organisations agree to share these expenses.

2.3.3 Share operational costs

For many agencies the high cost of running operations causes them to recognise that it may be beneficial to pool their resources. The following is a checklist of resources that potentially can be shared by two or more organisations:

- security for premises or field camps, including guards
- common infrastructure (offices, guest houses)
- communication facilities and equipment
- transport and warehouse facility
- office services: computers, printing
- purchase of materials, equipment

2.3.4 Development of joint plans

One of the most important results of joint assessment, information sharing and management is the conversion of information into a plan of action, utilising a strategic planning approach. The plan for strategic coordination will identify, from a broader perspective, which organisation will be performing a given task in a particular geographic location. The strategic plan identifies actions that maximise cost-effectiveness and speed of response. It should also include the mechanism for sharing operational support resources among the organisations. The elements of a strategic plan for coordination include:

- the emergency's needs and resources assessment
- the goals and objectives of the operation
- identification of roles and resources of organisations
- comparative analysis of advantages and drawbacks of organisations
- identification of potential duplication or gaps in provision of assistance
- identification of actions to be taken, by whom, ensuring no unnecessary duplication of services
- identification of operational support coordination activities, e.g. shared facilities and other resources
- Implementation schedule

Agencies will benefit from coordinating their operations with others who are involved in disaster preparedness or response. These benefits, however, do have a cost. To be effective, coordination must be seen as a task that is as important as other activities, and, accordingly, there must be funding to support coordination activities.

Early Warning Coordination in the Kyrgyz Republic

Maylu-Suu town in the Kyrgyz Republic has a population of approximately 10,000 people and is located in a highly landslide prone area. The vulnerability of the population is increased by the storage of radioactive wastes under landslide slopes. Presently, several of the most exposed areas have notification systems installed to warn the population. The systems were installed as a result of coordinated efforts among several ministries and structures in Kyrgyzstan as well as foreign agencies.

- A hydro-geological expedition by the Institute of Engineering Research assessed the hazard on the slopes
- The city administration provided the premises to install receivers and personnel to operate the facility and field transport
- City Civil Defence headquarters included landslide warning into the overall notification system and worked out an emergency evacuation plan jointly with local authorities
- The Institute of Rock Physics and Mechanics in the National Academy of Sciences identified the firmness of stored waste and developed facilities to control landslide hazards
- The Ministry for Emergencies and Civil Defence received partial funding for the project from the European Community through the German Committee of the International Decade on Natural Disaster Reduction (a semi-governmental organisation)

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3.   Identifying barriers to coordination

Recognising and identifying barriers to coordination is the first step in overcoming them. In the following table, some barriers to coordination are identified along with examples of how each may be manifested.

Barrier	Example
1. Threat to autonomy (real or perceived)	Members of organisations fear that coordination will reduce their freedom to make decisions and run programs.
2. Professional staff fears	Professionals fear loss of freedom—coordination agreements may require ways of working that are different from staff preferences.
3. Disagreement among resource providers	People or groups providing resources disagree about needs to be met, services to be provided, and programming approaches.
4. Multiple local government, private sector and non-governmental organisations	Coordination is complicated by the presence of too many actors, slowing the process and losing focus.
5. Absence of consensus among participants	Disagreements among organisations regarding: • the right of one or more organisations to be involved • which organisation should function in which geographic area • which organisation should provide which services • which affected populations are to be served by each organisation
6. Different expectations of different levels of the government hierarchy	Different expectations about which populations should be provided with which services—this may become complicated by differing and/or changing political interests.

Barrier	Example
7. Coordination viewed as low priority	Members of some organisations think that coordination is not really necessary and do not follow through with commitments.
8. Costs and benefits are viewed as unsatisfactory	Staff of some organisations think the costs of coordination or the program costs will be higher than the benefits.
9. Resources are not available	Some organisations which may want to participate in a coordinated effort have inadequate resources to contribute to the effort
10. Diffusion of "credit"	Sometimes recognition is the only form of personal reward that members of organisations receive. In a coordinated effort, however, "credit" for or acknowledgement of individual contributions may get lost or diffused.
11. Lack of trust	Participating agencies may have a history of poor relations leading them to see each other as threats, competitors and/or untrustworthy.
12. Fragmentation	The diversity of mandates, policies and procedures as well as ideologies, values and vested interests among all of the international organisations leads to a fragmentation within the "humanitarian response system"
13. Highly centralised bureaucratic organisations	Coordination will be hindered by agencies that must generally seek approval from their headquarters prior to approving inter-organisational goals or making commitments of time and resources.
14. Lack of coordination skills, knowledge and experience	Organisations that do not understand the preconditions and dynamic nature of coordination or that field representatives without proper training or skills will frustrate and be frustrated by coordination efforts.
15. Staff turnover	Frequent staff turnover threatens policy continuity, coordination agreements and institutional memory. Trust often depends on increased levels of familiarity and contact among parties, which is lost with high turnover rates.
16. Unilateral donor actions	When donors act unilaterally, politicise aid, or earmark funds for specific populations, they may undermine the efforts of established international coordinating mechanisms.
17. Ineffectual or inappropriate coordination leadership	Participation in coordination may break down if the leadership is autocratic, imposing their decisions and agenda on the body. Lack of leadership skills or resources will diminish the value and quality of the coordination effort.

One major obstacle to coordination is simply the competition between organisations for scarce resources. Both government and non-government agencies approach the same donors for funding for similar projects. Each agency is therefore viewed as a competitor. Acting on the belief that information is power and that this power can be used against you by a competitor fosters a non-cooperative attitude. Unfortunately donor agencies at times contribute to this competitive atmosphere by pitting agencies against each other. This has often carried over into disaster relief operations as the agency perceived as doing the most or with the greatest visibility is likely to receive the greatest support in the post response period. In this way inherent competition in the system is maintained. As discussed earlier, joint appeals may be one way to minimise competition and its effects.

4. Actions that facilitate coordination

While there are many barriers to coordination, there are also many actions and strategies that can be pursued to facilitate coordination. The table below suggests several of these.

Actions that facilitate coordination	
Actions	**Explanation**
1. Identify mutual interests and objectives	Lack of understanding or simple misunderstandings often prevent organisations from realising that they share many interests—prime among them the desire to best serve the interests and needs of beneficiaries.
2. Use effective negotiation skills	If you are the person who wants to initiate coordination with others, you will have to convince them that coordination is in their self-interest and that the benefits of joining in the coordination effort far outweigh the costs. This requires that you spend some time analysing the benefits and costs of coordination, and the self-interests, priorities and motivations of those you want to participate in the coordination activity. Once you know the answers to these questions, you can pitch your proposal in a way that best appeals to their main priorities and interests.
3. Secure funds that are tied to coordination	Get donors to stipulate that organisations can get the needed resources only if they coordinate effectively with others.
4. Increase awareness of interdependence	Discuss previous successes with coordination, or the absolute need to work together to improve effectiveness and the consequences of not doing so.
5. Standardise organisational activities	Organisations with standardised and routine services find it easier to coordinate because gaps in their service delivery may be more apparent and opportunities to interface with other organisations easier to pursue.
6. Choose the number and participating organisations strategically	The more organisations involved in a coordination effort, the more likely that it will break down. Only organisations that are directly involved and which have something to offer in addressing the target problem or opportunity should participate in a coordination partnership. Other organisations can be included on an ad hoc basis.

Actions	Explanation
7. Build personal relationships and trust	Disaster preparedness officers depend on many other institutional players to achieve their goals. This means that they must seek out and build relationships and trust with key players. Relationship building is best done over a cup of coffee or during breaks at joint meetings, and other such informal opportunities. In the final analysis, effective coordination depends on the strength of relationships and the level of mutual respect that people have for each other.
8. Invite dynamic/ creative people to join the coordination body	Often, the inclusion of dynamic leaders and personable participants in the coordination effort will attract others to participate and support it.
9. Promote effective leadership	Coordination efforts require formal and informal leaders who understand what it takes to support successful coordination and who have the facilitation, people and leadership skills required to motivate others towards a common coordination goal, process or outcome.
10. Ensure local decision making capacity	In large bureaucratic organisations, which have central headquarters and field representatives posted throughout the country in sub-regions or communities, coordination at the local level can be enhanced by assuring that field representatives have the authority to make decisions based on the realities of the local situation.
11. Improve coordination skills, knowledge and experience	Many coordination efforts fail because leaders and participants lack an awareness of the principles, skills and techniques required to make the effort succeed (see next section). The capabilities required to effectively coordinate with others can be improved through training and awareness raising about the challenges, opportunities, barriers and actions that facilitate coordination. In addition, skill building related to improved communication, and negotiation and meeting facilitation skills will also enhance efforts to coordinate.

All these actions that facilitate coordination share one common element: improved communication. All of them require that both those who initiate and those who are involved in coordination efforts build in formal and informal mechanisms for improving and increasing communication between all concerned.

5.   Coordination techniques

There are a variety of useful techniques, each of which is described below, that can assist in coordination efforts including:

- facilitation skills
- consensus building
- preparation of memoranda of understanding
- identification of each organisation's comparative strengths and mandates in order to establish a division of labour
- maintenance of a "communications loop"
- decision making in plenary meetings
- appropriate inclusion of partners in the process
- timely action, especially during the emergency phase
- follow up and follow-through on coordination decisions
- provision of personnel incentives to coordinate

5.1   Facilitation skills

The essence of coordination is working together, which requires some skills. Both the leadership of a coordination body and the other participants will benefit from effective facilitation skills in such activities as negotiation, conflict management, participatory team planning, effective presentations, meeting management and process monitoring and evaluation. Many of the following techniques are included in this range of skills.

5.2   Consensus building

While building consensus is difficult, if organisations wish to coordinate their response, achieving consensus on policy, programme, and resource issues is crucial to their success. They will need to reach agreement on:

- Geographical areas of operation (who will do what and where)
- Individual services or contribution to a programme of services
- Population each organisation will work with
- Standards of assistance and methods of delivery

5.3   Memoranda of understanding

Memoranda of understanding can mitigate potential inter-agency conflict by clarifying objectives, expectations, roles, policies, responsibilities and commitments. The process of agreeing to a memorandum of understanding may be as important as the product. During the process, organisations develop relationships and become more knowledgeable about each other.

Memoranda of understanding may need to be reviewed or updated when the players and/or the context change. Prototype memoranda of understanding should be developed to avoid having to identify and negotiate details during an emergency.

5.4   Identification of comparative strength of each organisation

The comparative advantage of an organisation depends not only on its mandate, but also on its actual expertise, capacities and resources. For example, a local National Society committee may lack funds and staff, but may be the only agency with experience working with a certain population or in a certain region.

5.5   Maintaining the "communications loop"

All organisations need to take responsibility for staying in touch with each other. The mechanisms for sharing information need to be adequate to quickly disseminate both critical and current information.

5.6   Decision making in plenary meetings

Inevitably, difficult and potentially divisive issues arise in a crisis. When it is obvious that a "floor fight" may occur at a coordination meeting between particular parties, those responsible for the differences of opinion may need to resolve these differences away from (and in preparation for) the plenary forum. Otherwise a divisive spirit between a few organisations may spread and lead to a breakdown of the whole coordination effort.

5.7   Appropriate inclusion of partners in the process

Appropriate membership in the coordination body is vital to its success. Small organisations with few resources to offer or organisations whose mandates and policies are at odds with the coordination body's objectives may impede successful coordination.

5.8   Timely action, especially during the emergency phase

Coordination should not be the cause of or the excuse for delays in responding to an emergency. To avoid delays, participating organisations need to establish arrangements before the emergency. Preparedness planning should include arrangements for acquiring stocks, identifying staff and establishing procedures and other necessary elements to be ready to respond quickly during an emergency operation.

5.9   Follow-up and follow-through on coordination decisions

The coordination body needs to have adequate staff and commitment to follow-up and to follow-through on decisions taken by the body. Coordination will flounder and dissipate without determined follow-up.

5.10   Provision of personnel incentives to coordination

As a prerequisite to participating in a coordination effort, organisations must value coordination. This value must be evident in the organisations' personnel policies. Successful staff participation in coordination activities must result in rewards, not penalties.

6.   Coordination issues in large scale emergencies

In the event of a large-scale emergency, very few countries have enough resources to cope. Generally, large-scale search and rescue activities at the national level are followed and complemented by efforts of the international community. IFRC delegates and National Society staff need to be aware of the roles and responsibilities of the various UN organisations. These are listed in Annex 1.

After a large-scale disaster,

- Representatives from the affected country should initiate a damage and needs assessment as soon as possible

- The appeal for international aid should conform to certain standards (the declaration of a disaster situation by the national government and the need for international assistance) and describe priority needs and the type of expected aid

- The affected country should guarantee simplified procedures for entry and exit of search and rescue teams, transport, equipment, and tracing dogs

- The affected country should organise a centre to provide communication with officials, discussion, and primary instructions for search and rescue teams

- The affected country should establish an On-site Operation Coordination Centre

Annex 1: Roles and responsibilities of United Nations agencies

At the national level, the National Societies should be familiar with the various United Nations Agencies that may be present in their country and of their function.

A. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

The mission of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to reduce human suffering and material destruction caused by natural disasters and emergencies by mobilising and coordinating the collective efforts of the international community, in particular those of the UN system. Its main functions are to advise the Secretary General on emergencies and recommend appropriate actions.

B. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

FAO's mission is to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, and to improve the efficiency of production and distribution of food and agricultural products. In relief operations, it focuses on the provision of agricultural inputs, such as seeds and veterinary services. This includes working closely with NGOs active in this field, and in some countries with UNICEF.

C. United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF)

To ensure a "first call for children" UNICEF mobilises both political will and material resources to help developing countries. UNICEF's niche in emergencies is its role as an advocate for children. Its general resources budget is over USD 500 million, 25 million of which is allocated to its Emergency Program Fund.

D. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP is the United Nations largest provider of grant funding for development and the main body for coordinating UN development assistance. UNDP provides logistic, communications and other support for the activities of the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and to UN Disaster Management Teams. UNDP's annual budget is USD one billion. Five percent is allocated for disaster preparedness. The UNDP Resident Coordinator has the right to allocate up to USD 50,000 for emergency needs to a country in a disaster situation.

E. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR's main task is to provide protection and assistance to refugees and to seek permanent solutions to the problems of refugees. UNHCR's operations can be classified into two categories:

- protection of refugees from further persecution and violence, including being forced back into areas from which they have fled, while helping lay foundations for lasting solutions to refugee problems.
- meeting the physical needs of refugees—UNHCR works to supply refugees with food, water, health care, shelter and sanitation.