



## **COMMUNICATION, COOPERATION & COORDINATION: IMPERATIVE FOR EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Humanitarian action is an enterprise involving multiple sectors, disciplines, functions, jurisdictions and a complex interplay of a web of relationships. These relationships must necessarily be nurtured and constantly oiled for a seamless flow of activities which are undertaken. These activities are undertaken by different individuals and organizations and for this to succeed, this tripod of cooperation, communication and coordination must be effectively in place. This paper therefore, reviews the roles and challenges of these variables, and their intricate task of wielding the emergency management and humanitarian assistance métier. It also evaluated the structure of the sector in Nigeria by asking laudable questions which answers may chart a new path for the sector in the country. The paper concluded by advocating for increased legislation, adherence to existing structures and systems, or development of new ones. Finally, it envisages streamlining of the structure to reduce duplication of functions and the eventual waste that results therefrom.

**Keywords:** coordination, cooperation, communication, humanitarian action, disaster management, Nigeria.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Humanitarian action in its full throttle requires some key components, which basically include coordination, and for this to be optimal, the elements of cooperation and communication have to be complimentary. The concept of coordination in humanitarian action is recognized as the major component that propels the activities of both national and international actors at the international stage.

However, the multi-sectorial, multi-disciplinary, multi resource and multi-jurisdictional nature of humanitarian action makes it very imperative for focal organizations to understand

the different structures, mandates, capacities, competencies, objectives, missions and visions of various humanitarian actors. These includes the UN system, International Non-Governmental organizations (INGOs) Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGOs) Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) community Based organizations (CBO) Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs) of government and Development partners, donors and national government playing in the humanitarian sector.

The harmonization of the financing, operation and evaluation of these activities can best be done with consistent communication, operational cooperation and coordination of both human and material resources. The inability of any single organization to meet all the needs of those needing assistance makes coordination and cooperation very important.

Larry Minear et.al (1992) describes coordination in the humanitarian sector as the systematic delivery of humanitarian assistance through the use of policy instruments that are cohesive and effective. The instruments of delivery include sensitively and sensibly deployed leadership with discipline within a conducive operating environment. It also utilizes strategic planning, adoption of the principles of division of labour, effective data management and cordial relationship with political authorities while adopting an effective framework.

In Nigeria, humanitarian coordination is divided into three different organizational units

- a. Ministries, Departments and Agencies
- b. UN systems
- c. International Non-Governmental Organizations/Donors/Development partners/ Government led organization.

These units form the two major humanitarian groups in the country:

- a. National organizations led by Director General, National Emergency Management Agency
- b. International organizations/Non-Governmental Organizations led by Head of Country Team of the United Nations

## **2.0 NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF NIGERIA**

The Disaster management structure in Nigeria run within the four levels of governance, which involves the federal, state, local government and community levels. It also involves the non-governmental organizations, CBOs, FBOs, INGOs, United National system, international development partners and donors. The National Emergency Management Agency is the national focal organization for emergency management in Nigeria.

The structure is made up also of other MDAs which have statutory mandates related to emergency management and the 36 state emergency management agencies and the FCT.

## **2.1 National Coordination Mechanism**

The structure culminates into the Humanitarian Consultative Forum (HCF), which is chaired by the Director General of NEMA, and co-chaired by the Head of Country team of the UN system in Nigeria. The membership of the HCF consist of the leads and co-leads of the 11 humanitarian sectors in the country.

The legal framework for the establishment of these systems for disaster management in Nigeria derives its impetus from the National Emergency Management Agency establishment Act 12 as amended by Act 50 of 1999. This act established the structured relationship of government and non-governmental organizations including ministries, departments, individuals and the private organizations in the sector. It also dictates the institutional arrangement for disaster mitigation and management which included the establishment of single entity at each level of government such as National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) responsible for coordination of such activities and maintaining communication and coordination at National level. State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) at the state level and local government emergency committee (LEMC) at the local government level and other community-based structures.

According to the United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/182 the state, which in Nigeria is the Federal government plays the lead role in humanitarian response. GA 46/182 states in its Guiding Principles (4):

“Each state has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence the affected state has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory”.

“States whose populations are in need of humanitarian assistance are called upon to facilitate the work of these organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, in particular the supply of food, medicines, shelter and healthcare, for which access to victims is essential.

## **2.2 Role of government in disaster management**

The Federal government in every situation that demands humanitarian action plays the following roles:

1. Provide leadership to the response
2. Ensure there is a mechanism for coordination with other humanitarian partners.
3. Facilitate easy entry and exit of non-residual humanitarian partners, personnel, goods and equipment.
4. Facilitate legal states of operations of non-residential humanitarian partners.

5. Provide “humanitarian space” ability of humanitarian actors to work independently and impartially in pursuit of humanitarian imperative.

According to National Disaster Management Framework (2010) 2.2.1 the roles of the Federal Government in Disaster Management is performed through the focal Agency which is the National Emergency Management Agency.

The Federal Government shall through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) shall by this policy perform the following disaster management functions which includes the formulation of policies, management and coordination of all research and stakeholder activities, involve in management of advocacy and sensitization, support and coordination of non-governmental organizations, receive relief materials on behalf of the federal government, monitor the state of preparedness of stakeholders and also prepare disaster management budget for the country, mobilize resources for search and rescue, and the facilitation of the establishment of state emergency management agencies and the local government emergency management committees. The Agency will also work towards strengthening the working relationship between the country and international organizations and agencies involved in humanitarian assistance.

The Agency also has the responsibility of assisting survivors, refugees and internationally displaced persons and those affected by adverse effects of mass deportation resulting from crises disasters and adverse foreign policies in their rehabilitation. It also will work closely to coordinate the distribution of relief materials to these affected persons.

The NDMF (2010) recognizes the functions of the state governments in disaster management as follows: It is the responsibility of the state governments to set up a state emergency management Agency which is backed up by a legislation from the state house of assembly, and also ensure the local government version of the body is set up.

### **2.3 Responsibilities of humanitarian partners**

The humanitarian partners have the responsibility of providing needs and beneficiary based assistance. All aids must seek to save lives and alleviate suffering including support to existing sources such as food, water, health, shelter, education etc.

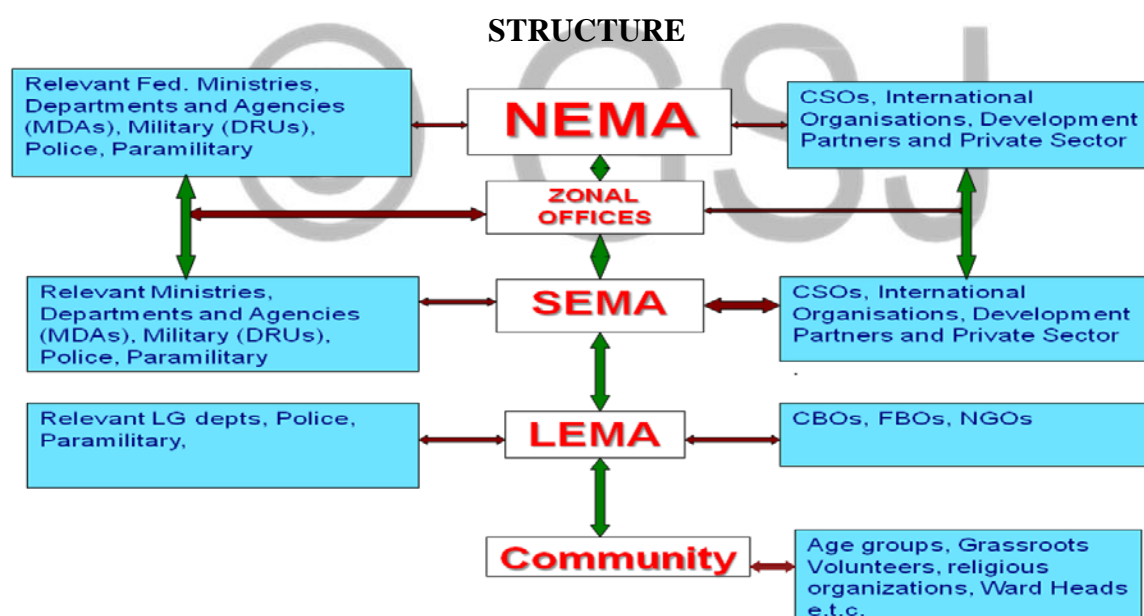
All activities aimed at ensuring respect for the rights of the individuals in accordance with the letter and the spirit of relevant bodies of law, including international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law. Protection should always be integrated into humanitarian assistance.

It must be noted the supporting role of humanitarian partners is carried out under the premise that no single organization has a comprehensive mandate or the capacity to assist and protect a large number of vulnerability population alone. This goes to confirm the multi-sectorial, multi-disciplinary and multi-functional nature of humanitarian action.

## 2.4 Structural relationship between actors in the Nigerian system

The national disaster management framework in NEMA (2001) establishes a coordination framework for disaster management in Nigeria. It establishes a vertical and horizontal coordination structure. On the vertical structure it establishes the relationship between NEMA, SEMA, LEMC and the community structure. At the state level, the SEMA would relate with NEMA through the zonal offices while the LEMC will manage the LGA structure and community and relate to SEMA while SEMA will then relate to NEMA.

On the Horizontal structure, NEMA will relate with other MDAs, DRUs, police, Para-military, international and local NGOs and development partners. The horizontal structure defines the relationship among DM stakeholders and different levels of government



Source: NDMF (2010)

It also recognizes the need for operational coordination using all tools available such as the Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (VCA), and the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

## 3.0 SECTOR DYNAMICS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN NIGERIA

The adoption of the National Contingency Plan in 2010 ushered in the sector-based humanitarian response system in Nigeria, which is an adaptation of the UN cluster system.

The structure recognizes the division of the coordination into two parts made up of

- a. National organization under the leadership of the Director General of the National Emergency Management Agency coordinated by NEMA and
- b. United Nations system and the International Non-Governmental Organizations under the leadership of HCT coordinated by the UNOCHA

Based on the above II humanitarian sectors were created material organizations as leads and international organization as co-leads. This is based on the UN resolutions 46/182 which confers on the state. The right to lead every humanitarian response.

The national sectors and lead/co-lead organizations are as below:

	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Co-lead</b>
1.	Food security	Fed Min of Agric.	FAO
2.	Camp Coordination & Camp Management (CCCM) UNHCR/IOM	NEMA	
3.	Early Recovery	NEMA	UNDP
4.	Education	Fed Min of Edu.	UNICEF/ Save the Children
5.	Emergency shelter	NEMA/NRC	UNHCR/ IFRC
6.	Health	Fed Min of health	WHO
7.	Logistics	NEMA	WFP
8.	Nutrition	Fed Min of Health	UNICEF
9.	Protection	NHRC	UNHCR
10.	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene	FMWR	UNICEF
11.	Information/Communication	FMI &C	OCHA/ UNICEF/ WFP
12.	Security	Police/NSCDC	UNDS

**Source:** NEMA (2010)

### 3.1 Inter sector coordination

This serves to provide the Humanitarian Consultative Forum (HCF) with a collective operational perspective on the humanitarian situation. It is also there to improve sectors' individual effectiveness through its collaboration with others especially in handling crew

cutting issues that may require the contribution of more than one sector to resolve. This brings to play the importance of coordination in any given system.

### 3.1.1 Role of inter sector coordination group

This group while assisting to maintain group synergy performs the following roles in the system:

- a. Keep the HCF informed of any operational response issues and requesting strategic level decisions when necessary.
- b. Sharing information among sectors (when, where, what, satraps, mappings on presence, operational and protection issues.
- c. Agree on common approaches in the response and issues to advocate on
- d. Planning and responding joint assessment, joint analysis, joint planning, and joint monitoring etc.
- e. Identify criteria for prioritizing funding, identify funding gaps.
- f. Ensure protection is mainstreamed into the response that the response engages with and is accountable to affected communities, is responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable and does not discriminate and avoids causing harm.

### 3.1.2 Result of effective inter-sector coordination group

<b>TASK</b>	<b>ACTION (Inter sector outputs)</b>
<b>Preparedness</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prepare contingency plans</li> <li>2. Coordination structures, joint needs assessment</li> </ol>
<b>Coordinated Assessments</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Development of joint assessment approach</li> <li>2. Conduct a multi cluster assessment</li> <li>3. Ensuring joint analysis of situation</li> </ol>
<b>Strategic Planning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint inter sectoral analysis</li> <li>2. Prioritization of response activities</li> <li>3. Adopt common approaches</li> <li>4. Inter sectoral seasonal calendar</li> </ol>
<b>Implementation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Link the timing of activities (vaccinations, nutrition assessment, food distribution)</li> <li>2. Agree joint advocacy messages (e.g. Access)</li> <li>3. Inter sector operational mix</li> </ol>
<b>Monitoring</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint framework for community feedback</li> </ol>

#### 4.0 THREE C'S OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

1. **Coordination:** This makes it possible for all organizations to effectively achieve its mandate through the accomplishment of both individual and group roles by working closely with each other without conflicts. This is even possible despite the fact that they have different ways of conducting their operations. Collaboration enhances group work among different agencies in order to achieve a central objective. This is typical in emergency management and humanitarian action as it starts from saving of lives, stabilization of scenes and ends with protection of critical infrastructure and properties.
2. **Cooperation** entails the understanding of individuals and institutions sharing responsibilities and effectively doing their jobs while working towards the optimization of collective goals and objectives.
3. **Communication** means the sharing of information and knowledge which ensures that every individual and institution in the loop understands what roles and responsibilities they owe the group and also the position of the organization on issues and concerns at every point in time of the activity. This puts everyone on the same page. The lack of this variable at any time in the emergency management cycle could lead to an actual disaster incident.

#### 4.10 Challenges of Humanitarian Coordination

Coordination in the humanitarian sector is bugged down by so many issues amongst which are the problem of organizational Pride which makes one organization find it difficult to work under the leadership of another in a particular response activity in conformity with the incident command structure. The issue of lack of clarity in the definition of the mandates of various organizations and situations where some organizations share in the management of a particular function, this results in conflicting mandates, goals, agenda and priorities in the field. (Pamar et.al, 2007, Sanderson 2019)

Other challenges include hidden agenda, mistrust or lack of confidence in coordinators, activities considered waste of time/time consuming, when cooperation is seen as a prelude to probable loss of power, autonomy, or identity. The differences in the approaches to various actions resulting from differing focus, mandates and methodologies and inadequate leadership support and Ignorance or lack of defining policy documents also constitute another level of challenge in humanitarian coordination (Bennett et.al, 2006, Boersma et.al 2016)



#### **4.20 Mitigants to challenges of humanitarian coordination**

In order for the actors to achieve optimal performance in the execution of their various activities in the field, their acts will need to be properly harmonized, as humanitarian action is a multi sector function. To assuage the import of the challenges faced in coordination, the following actions are needed to achieve the benefits of synergy. Whenever conflicts result from working together, the following strategies can be adopted to resolve them. The contenders can report to superiors to assist in resolving the challenges at their levels, engage in side door discussions, and also show respect for procedures and protocols.

It is also necessary to share credit for all actions jointly carried out, share scarce and necessary resources, which are needed to execute activities. The different organizations can request mediation when issues of the relationship is beginning to affect the output of their joint exercises, so see whether that can influence and encourage participants and other relevant organizations. It is also important to understand their point of view and be responsive to their suggestions as the lead organization, provide information-invite to meeting despite resistance (keep door open) and show positive results-demonstrate advantages of coordination.

Organizations will need to isolate or ignore unnecessary delays and visionless issues - don't waste the time of the team in idle talks, but, assign key roles to organizations that have the competence and capacity to implement to avoid costly errors and when challenges persist, seek and apply 3<sup>rd</sup> party pressure and finally discuss, negotiate, persuade and barter to achieve team harmony and cohesiveness.

#### **4.30 Benefits of Coordination**

Effective coordination of humanitarian actions has a lot of benefits amongst which are the improvement of work processes by Limiting chaos and confusion through proper definition of roles and identifying best practices that can apply to each job function and role. It also improves the credibility of the system for the public, donors, media and other stakeholders and all actions are properly managed. It helps in reducing wastages and duplication of roles and efforts and improves the economy of all actions (Balcik et.al, 2010)

Wider coverage of the assistance is achieved as a result of team work and effective communication. It also gives detailed information through continuous collaboration of the competencies of each stakeholder and ensures timely delivery of services.

#### **4.40 Ways to improve cooperation in humanitarian action**

According to NDMF (2010) one of the ways of improving cooperation is through the establishment of relationship with stakeholders and sharing common understanding on problems and solutions. To achieve this objective, the focal organization would be able to identify and relate with disaster management stakeholders and ensure that a desk officer for emergency management is appointed for each of its stakeholder organizations. It should also ensure that stakeholders meetings are held on regular basis, in order to periodically review policies, plans and strategies.

It is also the responsibility of the focal organization to ensure that educational, public awareness, advocacy and other meetings such as conferences, workshops and seminars are held regularly with all stakeholders in attendance. The organization should also conduct simulation exercises, engage volunteers, develop plans and carry out vulnerability capacity assessment of the entire country regularly and assist in building capacities of the populace and stakeholders in particular.

#### **4.50 Ways of improving communication in humanitarian action**

The NDMF (2010) prescribes strategies towards the improvement of communication in humanitarian action, with the understanding that this could enhance the effectiveness of teams. The NDMF asserts that effective communication is paramount in emergency management and should be functionally established amongst stakeholders.

It prescribes that the improvement of communication among stakeholders can be effected in the following ways; compilation of contact data of all stakeholders, establishing a continuous relationship with stakeholders, identification and utilization of information in respect of equipment holding, stakeholders' preparedness, establishment of call centres, communication equipment, liaising with equipment owners and telecommunication companies on how these services can be extended in case of emergencies.

### **5.0 FOUR MODELS OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION**

The models of humanitarian action is a framework used by International Humanitarian Actors in providing aid based on varying contextual factors and actors in affected countries; as the action taken in Nigeria may differ from the one taken in Indonesia. These models were developed by Ramalingam, B & J Mitchell (2014) in their work Responding to changing needs, challenges and opportunities for humanitarian action. Thus, these models link the

nature, scale and scope of humanitarian operational responses to capacities, interests, attitudes and demands of the affected country. The models are:

1. Comprehensive
2. Constrained
3. Collaborative, and
4. Consultative

### **Comprehensive model**

This model is commonly used in low-income countries, and is based on the notion of limited or no national capacity in managing, coordinating and delivering assistance. International agencies are the invited to come in to provide assistance and take the lead in response management and oversight (e.g. Haiti earthquake). The advantage of this model is the presence of an organised system as it is the *modus operandi* of most humanitarian actors. The disadvantage of this model is its insensitivity to context: norms, policies & culture, Lack of engagement with local & national actors and supply-driven rather than needs-oriented

### **Constrained model**

This model represents the most complex and challenging settings for aid delivery. It is usually found where humanitarian action is limited (safety and access) by encroachments of political interests. It is also common in active conflict areas; both sides manipulating the humanitarian space. (e.g. Syria Crisis). The major advantage of this model is the provision of necessary aid to affected populace utilising proper political and negotiation skills (e.g. MSF). The disadvantage of this model is that it affects the neutrality principle in humanitarian aid (forced to take sides) and it increases the threat to the safety of aid workers and limits their access to the affected populace.

### **Collaborative model**

This model envisages a situation where the International agencies work hand in hand with national and local actors and they support and enhance existing capacities of the country. This is found in countries where the average population is made up of middle-income and lower-middle-income citizens with capacity and resources for domestic responses. The advantage of this model is that the national actors take ownership and play a leadership role in coordination and oversight issues. It also has the disadvantage of raising tension between the national authority and international actors; preference in using the comprehensive model.

## **Consultative model**

This model is actually most preferred in countries with considerable domestic capacity to respond to disasters. They have most of their systems in place and working but may require assistance when capacity is greatly under pressure. The International agencies are called in to fill specific gaps and are incorporated into the domestic response framework. The disaster management system involves a very active domestic private sector, and private public partnership is essential (e.g. Japanese earthquake). The advantage of this model is that it encourages national and local engagement and enhances the existing domestic disaster management framework. However, it requires the availability of adequate funds and manpower.

## **What model suits the Nigerian situation?**

The Nigeria situation and environment could be best matched with the collaborative model, but this can only assist our situation if the following are considered.

- a) Ensure assistance provided by International Actors are geared towards our demand pull.
- b) Build our domestic capacity (skills and material base) so we can reduce our reliance on international aid.
- c) Carry out post-crisis intervention evaluation and incorporate lessons learnt in our domestic disaster management framework.
- d) Ensure our government takes ownership and answer the question; whose emergency is it really?
- e) Since the model is taking precedence in funding; it may become the de facto model overtime.

## **6.0 IMPROVING HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN NIGERIA: QUESTIONS TO CHART THE PATH**

### **Coordination**

1. Do we understand the existing coordination structure?
2. How effective is the structure?
3. At what forum and how does the states and national organizations compare notes?
4. Where do the NGOs and INGOs belong in this system? Are they properly empowered?
5. Do we recognize the roles NGOs & INGOS play?

6. Should there be a separate working group for this category of actors (INGOs &NGOs) making it 3 groups for clearer path of communication and coordination?
7. Who and who is involved in Humanitarian Action?
8. Is there a better way to do this?
9. How would the needed changes be kick started?

### **Communication**

1. What role is effective communication playing in the sector?
2. Are the actors aware of their roles?
3. How do we relate among the actors and with the public?
4. What is the perception of the public about what we do?
5. Are we aware of the channels of Communication in emergencies?
6. Can we actually improve on it?
7. Do we actually walk the talk?
8. Is there cohesion and harmony in our communication?
9. Do we understand the implications of failed communication in this business?

### **Cooperation**

1. Who manages the relationships in the sector?
2. How do the entrants find their way?
3. Do we have any framework for cooperation in the sector?
4. How do we harmonize the needs of the country with the objectives of individual operators?
5. Who regulates both national and internal cooperation in Humanitarian action?
6. Are there available sanctions and procedures to enforce them?
7. What are the rules of engagement?
8. Is it not time to include the organized private sector in the formal Humanitarian structure?

The answers to these questions will chart the part for improved humanitarian action in Nigeria.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

One of the most complex roles in any system is the management of a single objective that will bring several independent organizations that have different statutory mandates, independent structures, various sources of power and funding together once in a while, in order to execute optimally that singular objective. The bringing together of these

organizations would naturally require the best of coordination, cooperation and communication.

This has been at the centre of the management of humanitarian action in Nigeria, and calls for streamlining of the various mandates, increase in the number of effective and liberalized legislations, properly defined and adhered to structures so as to reduce if not avoid duplication of efforts, agencies, and organizations in order to make the three Cs more rewarding.

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