EASTERN PAKTIA COORDINATION

Assessment report

1 October 1991 - 31 March 1992

by

Marion Couldrey
Project Coordinator

Eastern Paktia Coordination Group

22 April 1992

ACBAR
Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Implementation Process</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Description</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assessment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Problems and constraints</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Achievements and Outputs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Administration and coordination</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Implementation of assistance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Project Impact</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive impacts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Negative impacts</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Conclusions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Recommendations</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. The Future of the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A. INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Paktia Coordination Group was established at a meeting of UN and NGO agencies on 23 September 1991. The liberation of the city of Khost in eastern Paktia in March 1991 had opened up the area both to NGOs wishing to start rehabilitation work and to refugees wishing to return in peace to their homes.

Soon after the mujahideen took control of Khost, a small number of NGOs started surveying the Khost basin and planning rehabilitation programmes. Surveys soon indicated that the extent of damage and destruction in the area was considerable and beyond the capacities of these few NGOs. One of the NGOs, DACAAR, discussed the issue with UNDP and together they called a joint meeting of all interested UN and NGO agencies to propose a cooperative effort for the provision of assistance to eastern Paktia.

The proposal was agreed, UNDP agreed to fund the taskforce for an initial six months, ACBAR seconded a member of staff as full-time coordinator and the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group held its first meeting on 1 October 1991.

The primary objective of the Group was to coordinate the planning and implementation of assistance by all NGOs interested in the area. This objective was not a new one, although it related to a new situation - that of newly accessible land where few NGOs had started work. What was new and of huge importance was the basic principle on which the Group was based. It was agreed that guidelines agreed by the Group would be binding (not optional) for all agencies and that funding by donors would be conditional upon participation in the Group and adherence to Group guidelines and decisions. (Only USAID reserved the right ultimately to fund a non-cooperating NGO or US contractor if, after investigation, USAID did not agree with the ruling of the Group, though they were in agreement with the basic principle.)

In the initial meetings in early October, agencies were asked to commit themselves to the basic principle; they also agreed that majority decisions would be binding on all agencies whether or not they were present at the discussions. The public statement of commitment generated a sense of unity and purpose which, on the whole, was sustained throughout the six months. Latecomers to the Group - agencies continue to join even now - were not part of that initial statement of commitment and have had to have more personal briefings by the Coordinator to instil in them the importance of adhering to Group decisions.
B. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

1. Description of implementation process

At the first meeting, a Reference Group was elected to serve as advisors to the Coordinator. This group comprised two UN representatives and two NGO representatives. The main Coordination Group meetings for all agencies were always chaired by a member of the Reference Group.

It was decided not to elect a chairperson. Inadvertently, however, the UNDP representative was often presumed to be the chairperson because of the significant role he played in chairing most of the main meetings and in clarifying the direction of the Group vis-à-vis donors as well as implementing agencies.

Having elected the Reference Group, the coordination initiative proceeded to develop through three main methods of implementation:

i. Main Coordination Group meetings and other policy meetings:

for development of cross-sectoral guidelines, discussion of policy issues and developments relating to eastern Paktia, preparation and authorisation of delegations, improvement of coordination processes, liaison with Security Shura of Khost, etc.

Coordination Group meetings

There have been eight of these, with an average attendance of 30 different NGOs. Their main role is to bring all agencies together to agree cross-sectoral policies and issues.

Reference Group meetings

The Reference Group comprises four representatives elected by the Coordination Group: two from NGOs, two from the UN. The Project Coordinator is an additional member of the Reference Group. One of the representatives chairs the Coordination Group meeting and other major meetings as required. There have been four Reference Group meetings, mainly to assess developments and prepare for forthcoming meetings.

Donors meetings

There have been two donors meetings to report on the development of the project, to discuss funding issues and to encourage their participation.

Joint meetings with Security Shura of Khost

Two of these have been held (one unscheduled) in which issues of concern to the Security Shura and people of eastern Paktia have been discussed and some policy matters agreed (e.g. wage levels).
Delegations to eastern Paktia

First delegation: November 1991
Two main objectives: to investigate lines of authority in the area and to inform the local people of the work of the Coordination Group.

Second delegation: February 1992
Objective: to share NGOs' plan of work with the Security Shura and obtain their approval.

There have also been one-off meetings on specific policy issues, such as the coordination of food inputs.

ii. Sectoral subgroup meetings: for development of sectoral guidelines, discussion of sectoral issues and coordination of agencies' plans.

There are eight sectoral subgroups: agriculture, construction, drinking water, education/income generation, health, irrigation, road construction and veterinary/livestock. Throughout the six months there have been 31 meetings of these groups (roughly four meetings of each group but only two for the newer road construction subgroup).

The construction subgroup has spawned a couple of additional working groups which have both met twice: technical construction and concrete beam production. Again related to construction, there has been one meeting on the more specific policy issue of burnt brick kilns.

iii. Information gathering and dissemination by Project Coordinator

Information relating directly to the Coordination Group is centralised in a series of files in the Project Coordinator's office. Additional resource materials relating to the former GTZ/Eastern Paktia project have been compiled by DACAAR and are available in the ACBAR Resource and Information Centre (ARIC library).

The Project Coordinator has summarised NGOs' project information and plans in various formats for dissemination to all agencies. The Project Coordinator has also had innumerable meetings with individual agencies to assist and advise them in their coordination concerns.

2. Assessment of implementation process

The implementation process has worked relatively well, with responsibilities defined and shared. Individual agencies and representatives have on the whole carried out additional responsibilities effectively, such as chairing subgroups and participating in delegations. The main hindrance to the process has been the occasional difficulty in obtaining the necessary information from agencies; this is discussed later.
Attendance at the main Coordination Group meetings remained high throughout the six months. Towards the end of this period attendance at the sectoral subgroups lessened somewhat, probably reflecting the feeling that the groundwork had been done and regular meetings were becoming less necessary.

The roles of the Project Coordinator and of the chairperson of major meetings have been key in the effective running of meetings and general coordination. The first set of sectoral subgroups in October were chaired, run and minuted by appointed sectoral coordinators; the Project Coordinator was not present, although she had briefed the coordinators on the agenda and expected outputs of the meetings. This system proved unsatisfactory on the whole as no standardisation of approach or output was possible. In some cases, the drawing up of guidelines was delayed by this initial procedure. Since then, all sectoral subgroups have been organised, attended and minuted by the Project Coordinator, though often chaired by someone else. This has proved effective, enabling continuity of approach and facilitating better follow-up.

Specifically technical discussions have been chaired and minuted by a technical person, usually without the attendance of the Project Coordinator.

Although it was decided at the beginning not to elect an overall chairperson, the role that the UNDP representative actually played was in effect that of a chairperson - and was extremely helpful. The importance of having one member in particular of the Reference Group with a degree of authority within the UN system and with the ability to promote the Group as a donor to other donors cannot be overstated.

The Eastern Paktia Coordination Group has consistently stressed the need to consult thoroughly with the local authorities of eastern Paktia. Although there have been some difficulties in this (see below), throughout the project period, the Security Shura and other authorities have been extremely cooperative, contributing to a peaceful and constructive atmosphere. Agencies have taken seriously the Security Shura's request to be consulted by them and so have helped contribute to the high level of cooperation received. Liaison and consultation with local bodies have taken place throughout, with the requests of the local shuras and the Security Shura being fed into either sectoral subgroups or the main Coordination Group for consideration.

It should be noted that throughout this report, reference is made to the Security Shura as the main representative body in eastern Paktia, based in Khost. The name and nature of this body continues to change but the title of Security Shura is retained here for the purpose of clarity.
3. Problems and constraints affecting the implementation process

i. Consultation with local authorities

It has been slightly more difficult than expected to consult closely with the local authorities within eastern Paktia. The lines of authority have been developing and changing, making it difficult at times to know to whom the Group should address its requests. For example, when the second delegation visited the Security Shura to present the overall work plan, the shura was in the process of reorganisation and the representatives who received the delegation were different from those with whom the Group had previously liaised. It was therefore uncertain for some time whether their approval of the plan indicated a representative body's approval or not. However, the Group has tried to accept the local authorities' reassurance that such problems are their own internal political problems and would not affect assistance.

ii. Submission of information by NGOs

Throughout the project period it has been difficult at times to obtain the necessary amount of information regarding NGOs' ongoing and proposed projects. This is not surprising, given the large number of NGOs and the varying degrees of clarity in their plans but it can occasionally lead to a dilemma for the Project Coordinator.

The responsibility for organising and encouraging the coordination process was placed mainly in the hands of the Project Coordinator. To some degree this may have encouraged NGOs to ignore their own responsibilities for consultation as they occasionally seemed to assume that the Project Coordinator would do it all for them. When information needed is not forthcoming, should the Coordinator visit all the individual agency offices personally to extract the information? When the Coordinator advised NGOs to consult with certain other NGOs on a particular matter, this did not always happen. Should the Coordinator accept responsibility for calling all such meetings herself? A compromise needs to be reached as to how much work it is necessary for the Project Coordinator to do for the sake of better present coordination and how much should be left to the responsibility of the NGOs to train them for the sake of better future coordination.

iii. Consultation by NGOs

Similarly, some NGOs are conscientious about checking with the information summaries and the Project Coordinator prior to visiting the area or preparing proposals. Others are not. This has given rise to a few clashes of interest and to the submission of some inappropriate or duplicate proposals. The channels for identifying and addressing such potential problems exist and they are usually resolved, mainly at an early stage (and at an earlier stage than would have been possible without the systems set up).
This still represents wasted energy but the need to consult is a lesson that at least is being learned, albeit slowly in some cases.

iv. Influx of 'new' agencies throughout the project period

Agencies joining the Coordination Group later on have missed an important period of group commitment and have generally proved to be somewhat less participative and less conscientious in adhering to the agreed procedures and guidelines.
C. ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTPUTS

1. Administration and coordination

   i. Sectoral guidelines

   Technical standards and guidelines were drawn up for six of the eight sectors: agriculture, construction, drinking water, education/income generation, health and irrigation.

   Technical standards have not been drawn up for the remaining two sectors: veterinary/livestock and road construction. The veterinary/livestock subgroup agreed that they should continue to follow the existing ACBAR guidelines and that therefore no new or eastern Paktia-specific guidelines were needed. However, some informal guidelines have emerged in the course of this subgroup's meetings and are documented in the minutes: e.g. clinics should be located no less than 20km apart.

   The road construction subgroup was not established until January and has not produced separate guidelines. However, UNDP's guidelines have been circulated to all agencies concerned.

   The sectoral guidelines are not exhaustive but they do represent a serious consideration and agreement on sectoral issues of concern and as such form a useful practical basis for implementation. They are working guidelines, open to improvement, and will no doubt be further developed in the future.

   More detailed technical decisions for the construction subgroup were made in two separate technical construction meetings.

   One set of the sectoral guidelines has been translated into Pashto to encourage greater understanding and use by Afghans. The other sets will be translated as soon as possible.

   For a variety of reasons, none of the guidelines adequately covers the issue of community participation; this issue is discussed in sections E and F.

   ii. Cross-sectoral guidelines

   Two sets of cross-sectoral guidelines were produced. They are applicable to all participating agencies and were approved in the main Coordination Group, rather than in sectoral subgroups:

   a) Cross-sectoral guidelines
      (covering general points relating mainly to coordination within the Group and NGO-shura cooperation)

   b) Checklist for points to include in NGO-shura contracts
      (includes points relating to NGO-shura cooperation and consultation and project implementation; some points are marked 'essential' for inclusion and others 'advised')
The Checklist for points to include in NGO-shura contracts has been translated and presented to the Security Shura of Khost for distribution to local shuras as well.

Agreement on these cross-sectoral guidelines was seen as an important achievement within the Group; they form a solid basis for improved coordination and consultation and also reflect the responsibilities of agencies towards the local people.

iii. Wage standards

Wage levels have been set for unskilled labour (Pak Rs 45-50 per day) and for skilled labour (Pak Rs 100-120 per day). Rs 50 and Rs 120 are maximum wages; no minimum wage has been set.

These levels were agreed finally in March with the Security Shura of Khost and have been effective in preventing any conflict so far over wages paid by agencies to local people. This is also a useful achievement.

Comments

Many smaller, perhaps newer, NGOs have been brought into a new coordination forum for the first time and have been able to be part of the initial formative decision-making processes of a large group. They have learned about coordination, cooperation and consultation; they have seen the commitment it takes and the results it can produce. None has dropped out and their participation on the whole has been enthusiastic.

Systems have been developed for obtaining information from individual agencies about their current and proposed projects, producing summaries to share this information with other agencies, updating summaries/files as necessary, advising individual agencies, briefing new agencies, etc. As the project developed, so too did the systems; methods improved, understanding of issues and difficulties grew and gradually a more solid basis for future coordination has been built.

The appreciation of shortcomings and possible improvements is an important part of the development process of any such group. Useful lessons have been learned; sections E and F indicate how the preparation and coordination of assistance to eastern Paktia could have been improved — and can be improved for this and future coordination projects.
2. Implementation of assistance

When the Coordination Group started, there were about five NGOs working or planning to work in the area; at the end of six months there are now 32 NGOs actually working with some 17 others with plans to work.

Work in all sectors has started and recent reports from visits to the area are encouraging; canals are being cleaned, a large proportion of the agricultural land is under cultivation, a number of health and veterinary clinics are now functioning, concrete beam production has started in several locations, two income-generation training centres are being established, several lengths of road are being reconstructed and drinking water supplies are being improved in a number of areas.

However, many programmes are still at proposal stage with no early decisions in sight. Such delays have caused some frustration among the local people. This situation is compounded - or perhaps caused - by the very nature of individual agencies with their own skills and interests all going in separately to the area to assess needs and decide where they can and where they want to work. In February sectoral meetings were held to assess the distribution of assistance, to identify gaps and needs, and to encourage agencies to try to adapt their programmes accordingly. By then, however, two things had happened: firstly, those agencies who had started had, on the whole, agreed their budgets and had little or no surplus for flexibility; secondly, agencies with programmes still at proposal stage had set ideas about where they wanted to work and had little desire to change their plans and/or inconvenience donors at the decision-making stage. These problems are inevitable in the existing system of individual assessments by a large number of individual agencies presenting proposals to different donors often not in close communication. The only solution is probably to change the system; suggestions are given in section F.
D. PROJECT IMPACT

1. Positive impacts

At the end of the six months of the project, there was participation by 51 NGOs (some still at planning stage), 8 UN agencies and 5 other donor agencies (of which one is also an implementing NGO). With a couple of exceptions, attendance at meetings remained high, indicating commitment to the principles of the Group and realisation that individual agencies should benefit from participation.

i. Impact on direct beneficiaries (ACBAR, NGOs, UN):

This new initiative has forced a large number of NGOs - some ACBAR members, some not - to reassess their usual methods of coordination and implementation. This challenge to established practices has been productive. Furthermore, for many of the Afghan NGOs in particular, it has been a learning process in procedures, participation in meetings, coordination possibilities and general inter-agency liaison. The Project Coordinator has taken on this informal training element as having importance in its own right, for the current project and for the more general goal of encouraging all NGOs to improve their own coordination, administration and participation abilities. Again, this development has been productive and should have direct impact on the ability of ACBAR to facilitate coordination.

As stated above, the continued involvement of all NGOs indicates an appreciation of the benefits of this coordination effort, although there is no doubt an element of pressure by the donors' requirement to participate as a condition of funding. However, most agencies appreciated the opportunity presented by the 'new' area of eastern Paktia not only to get funding for their agencies but to work together to try to provide assistance more effectively and coherently than before in other areas. They have worked to produce guidelines which are now proving to be of wider use; the ACBAR Ghazni coordination committee has requested copies of all eastern Paktia guidelines to form the basis of their own discussions. NGOs have seen that, with commitment and energy and a full-time coordinator, a higher degree of coordination is possible. This has been an important lesson.

It has been difficult for some agencies to accept the need for thorough consultation; some older agencies are used to working very independently - almost in a vacuum - and some have sufficient 'own' funding to encourage them to ignore other agencies. These are a small minority, however, and continued pressure from the Project Coordinator, other agencies and donors seems to be having some effect.

In the next phase of the project (beyond the period of UNDP/OPS funding), the Group's commitment to developing systems for standardised, transparent monitoring will be useful in facilitating and encouraging improved quality of work - and in identifying any shortcomings in the work of individual agencies.
Improvement in coordination procedures has been an implicit objective of the project, accepted and supported by participating agencies; this has led to a number of developments of positive impact.

One such development has been the encouragement of partnerships in the area. The smaller sectoral subgroups have been able to generate a positive atmosphere in which NGOs have reached agreements on who should do what and where and, in some cases, agreements on how to combine different NGOs' skills to develop a more integrated programme.

Another positive impact of the project has been its ability to identify potentially divisive issues and to bring together the NGOs involved for discussions before it is too late. For example, a special debate was held on the issue of burnt brick kilns - their suitability for eastern Paktia and their potential environmental impact. This involved several agencies and donors; since then, the proposing and the opposing agencies have been having constructive, educational discussions about alternative technologies. Again, something similar has occurred with concrete beam production; agencies have spent time together in meetings and in visiting the training and experimental centre of one agency to learn and discuss different technologies, including earthquake resistance technologies. All these discussions have been kept focussed, and therefore dynamic, by being centred on the needs of eastern Paktia.

One important lesson learned by NGOs relates to the requirement by the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group for NGOs to surrender a certain degree of autonomy to the Group. Group decisions (made by a majority) are binding for all participants. This principle was agreed at the beginning by both participants and donors and it laid an essential foundation of authority for the Group without which it would have been far less effective. There have been several examples of NGOs who have consented to change aspects of their projects at the request of the Group.

Donors benefit from the project because of a) generally improved coordination, b) the screening ability of the Group and c) the opportunity to consult the Project Coordinator for an overview of developments plus an objective assessment of funding needs and individual agencies' commitment to coordination.

One major new development relating to donors has been proposed and accepted and is now being implemented. In their February meeting, donors proposed that all project proposals being considered by them for funding should be forwarded before any decision is made to the Project Coordinator to check for adherence to the Group's guidelines. If there is no objection, the donor may then proceed to make the funding decision. If there is an objection, the Project Coordinator indicates on the standard Proposal checking form the nature of the objection and suggestions for consultation or resolution. This facilitates the checking process for donors and ensures that key coordination requirements are checked systematically.
ii. **Impact on indirect beneficiaries:**

The local people have been involved in consultation and should be able to feel greater ownership of projects. The provision of work plan charts, minutes of joint meetings and certain cross-sectoral guidelines to the Security Shura and to local shuras aims to involve them more fully and to encourage their monitoring ability.

Since the project began and implementation started on projects, people have slowly started to return to the area from the refugee camps. Now, after Ramazan, UNHCR is reporting what appears to be a significant increase in the number of families returning. It has always been noticeable that wage-paying projects have encouraged male refugees to return; the return of families with their household goods signifies more permanent repatriation, encouraged no doubt by the growing evidence of NGO assistance in eastern Paktia.

The local people have expressed some frustration over the length of time involved in developing assistance programmes for eastern Paktia. The Project Coordinator and Group have frequently been involved in explanations of the need for surveys and consultation, the delays inherent in funding decisions and the reality of differing agency agenda. This in itself has been a learning process for the local people. Despite the delays, however, the project should help provide better quality of assistance in the long term and is certainly enabling duplication to be avoided in the short term.

2. **Negative impacts**

As with any new initiative, there were inevitably some negative effects. A number of these can be traced back to the impact of the sudden display of interest by the UN and other donors:

i. It encouraged a large number of smaller NGOs to get involved, knowing that funding would probably be available. In turn, the sudden influx of many NGOs into the area to do preliminary surveys inevitably raised the expectations of the local people prematurely. The delay between initial visits and actual implementation has also caused some frustration.

ii. It generated competition among some of the smaller NGOs for funding - competition which may have been based more on the desire for core funding than on the perceived needs of the area. Over time, this competitive element has been confronted in the sectoral subgroups and, on the whole, resolved.

iii. It gave rise to a potentially serious reaction in the early days of the project. Just before the first delegation was due to arrive in eastern Paktia, reports came in that certain commanders or elders were trying to force large numbers of refugees in camps to return to the area to demonstrate the presence of a needy population; refugees who refused were told that their houses would be burned down, though it is not clear whether the threat was acted upon or not.
iv. The local people realised the importance attached to this coordination initiative and used this argument to assert their group strength; the shura of Jaji Maidan, for example, issued a threat to the Project Coordinator to disrupt the whole coordination effort if their area was not included. (The fact that the issue was settled amicably through the consultative process perhaps turned the point into a positive impact - and reflects the strength of the consultative channels established between Coordination Group and local authorities, in particular the Security Shura.)

v. Inevitably, the increased interest encouraged vehicle rental prices in the area to increase significantly. This is a negative effect for agencies and their budgets but may rather be seen as the simple working of market forces to the benefit of the local traders. (NGOs have agreed to set a ceiling above which they will not pay. When it reaches that ceiling, they may feel free to hire vehicles from outside the local area.)

None of these negative effects has been particularly detrimental to the project or to the quality of assistance provided but should be borne in mind for similar initiatives in the future.
E. CONCLUSIONS

There are now reconstruction and rehabilitation projects being implemented in all nine districts of eastern Paktia, representing the eight different sectors of agriculture, construction, drinking water, education/income generation, health, irrigation, road construction and veterinary/livestock.

Throughout the project, systems have been developed to improve the coordination of these projects and guidelines have been agreed to improve technical and coordination standards.

Lessons learned during this six month period will continue to benefit the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group in the future and will also be fed into other coordination fora (as well as to individual NGOs, UN agencies and donors) for their consideration.

This has been a worthwhile project, both to achieve the direct goal of assistance to eastern Paktia and also to create and sustain a new initiative involving a large number of agencies who have worked constructively together to improve methods of coordination; it has set an example to be built upon.

The overall lesson to be learned is that better coordination can be achieved when there is a higher input of commitment, energy and staffing, when there is a more immediate focus on a certain situation and location and when there is a binding principle of coordination accepted from the beginning.

More specific lessons learned are given below; some of these statements are expanded in the next section where recommendations are also given.

i. The coordinator of such an initiative needs to have good organisational and communication skills, and to be able to work full-time.

ii. Basic principles of commitment and adherence to guidelines must be agreed at the beginning and reinforced throughout the project.

iii. The participation and commitment of donors is essential.

iv. Agencies joining later have less commitment.

v. The involvement from the beginning of a large number of disparate NGOs can delay and detract from the coordination effort.

vi. It is often hard to gather information from NGOs.

vii. Attention needs to be paid to developing the Group members' ability to participate actively and effectively within the Group.
viii. Sectoral databases should be run by people with the appropriate technical knowledge.

ix. A database needs to be updated and disseminated regularly in order to be of assistance to coordination.

x. Chairs of meetings should be selected for their chairing ability.

xi. Policy agreements on community participation need to be reached prior to NGO implementation; otherwise, the potential for such participation to be damaged by the actions of one or more NGOs is considerable.
F. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section repeats the conclusions above, expands on some of them and adds recommendations for each.

i. **The coordinator of such an initiative needs to have good organisational and communication skills, and preferably to be able to work full-time.**

Recommendations:

Funding should be provided for a full-time coordinator with proven organisational, meeting and communication skills. Ability to work alongside a large number of very varied agencies as well as representatives of shuras and other local authorities is essential.

ii. **Basic principles of commitment and adherence to guidelines must be agreed at the beginning and reinforced throughout the project.**

Recommendations:

All agencies working or wishing to work in the area in question should be required by donors to participate in the coordination group. Majority Group decisions and guidelines should be binding on all agencies. These principles should be agreed by all agencies from the beginning of their participation in the group.

iii. **The participation and commitment of donors is essential.**

When NGOs know that donors require coordination as a condition of funding, they attend meetings much more regularly.

When donors agree a policy, they should ensure that they follow it. There has been a slow uptake, for example, by donors on the use of the Proposal checking form procedure proposed by them.

Recommendations:

Donors should constantly reiterate their demands for coordination and should take an active interest in the working of the Group. They should in turn be responsible to the Group and Reference Group for any actions or inaction undermining the coordination effort. They should utilise the Proposal checking form in all cases.
iv. **Agencies joining later have less commitment.**

**Recommendations:**

*either:* When any new agency joins the coordination effort, they should have a formal meeting with the Project Coordinator (perhaps with one member of the Reference Group also present) to be briefed fully on the aims, principles and procedures of the Group. Each new agency should then introduce itself to the main Group and state its commitment.

*or:* Each agency should sign a commitment sheet on receipt of introductory briefing (written or verbal).

v. **The involvement from the beginning of a large number of disparate NGOs can delay and detract from the coordination effort.**

A large number of NGOs suddenly considering work in one relatively small area can lead to competition, raised local expectations and a tendency to employ differing survey and implementation policies.

The presence of a large number of smaller NGOs can encourage a tendency towards a scattering of diverse projects rather than towards integrated programmes.

NGOs often do not consult other agencies before making preliminary surveys nor consult the Project Coordinator or the Project files. This can lead to duplication, raised local expectations and later conflict.

**Recommendations:**

Building on the experience of the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group and based on the suggestions below, an improved methodology for preparing and coordinating assistance to a new area should be developed and tried.

Small groups of two or three NGOs with one UN technical person should be chosen at the beginning for each sector to undertake preliminary surveys for the whole area (consulting with the local authorities) and to write up recommendations. Meanwhile, all implementing agencies would submit details of their technical, administrative and funding capacities. Following the recommendations of the preliminary reports, work on integrated programmes could be allocated as appropriate, with an emphasis on localised concentrations of individual or small groups of agencies. Detailed technical surveys may be required for some sectors; again, a small number of experienced agencies with proven survey skills would undertake this work, with implementation allocated to different agencies after the technical assessment of requirements.
(To some extent, this is what FAO is doing in irrigation for a large area in eastern Paktia. They did a preliminary survey themselves and drew up maps and provisional plans; then they funded 3 large experienced agencies to undertake the detailed technical surveys. When those results are known, funding for reconstruction will then be allocated to a number of implementing NGOs based on their particular skills.)

Assessment of funding needs by sector would be made and matched with existing NGO funding abilities plus pledges from donors. Additional requests could then be made to donors, based on solid integrated programme plans.

With this system, it might take slightly longer before implementation started but the benefits would be considerable. Essential information would be centralised and highly accessible rather than dispersed amongst all the agencies. High standards of surveys could be established and maintained. Expectations of the local people would not be raised prematurely. Implementation guidelines and general policies could be drawn up prior to any implementation. Small NGOs without funding would not waste scarce resources in surveys and in inappropriate proposal submissions. Assistance would be less scattered and more integrated; projects would also benefit from the NGOs' better understanding and knowledge of a small area, plus closer working relations with the local communities. Monitoring would be far easier to organise, to the benefit of the local people, the NGOs and the donors.

There would have to be an initial funding commitment from donors and a number of the larger NGOs in order to start the process of preliminary surveys and then technical surveys. Donors would also have to be committed to working within a flexible time scale.

vi. It is often hard to gather information from NGOs.

Recommendations:

Firstly, whenever possible, the Project Coordinator needs to design information request forms for use by agencies, for whatever particular information is needed - for project information, survey details or summaries, forthcoming or previous visit reports, monitoring, etc. The simpler and more specific the questions are, the better. Deadlines should always be set, with the realisation that some telephone chasing may be necessary.

Secondly, the Project Coordinator should accept that there is a point beyond which it may not be worth pursuing an NGO for information. A warning letter at this point from the Group or Reference Group might be appropriate.
vii. **Attention needs to be paid to developing the Group members' ability to participate actively and effectively within the Group.**

**Recommendations:**

All guidelines and standards should be translated into Pashto or Farsi as soon as possible, and promoted actively.

All participants should be encouraged to study and follow the advice set out in the **Effective participation in meetings** paper produced by the Project Coordinator (to be circulated at the first Coordination Group meeting in April, also translated into Pashto).

viii. **Sectoral databases should be run by people with the appropriate technical knowledge.**

The Project Coordinator is not necessarily the most appropriate person to gather and organise sectoral information as often specific technical knowledge is necessary for accurate assessment and charting of project details.

**Recommendations:**

Any complex sectoral database should be established and maintained by an agency experienced both in the sector and in the provision and use of information.

ix. **A database needs to be updated and disseminated regularly in order to be of assistance to coordination.**

Several misunderstandings arose when the irrigation database was not updated due to staff shortages.

**Recommendations:**

If an agency takes on the responsibility for establishing and maintaining a database, it must do so having realistically assessed its ability to continue with the maintenance.

If other NGOs agree to such an agency taking on a database role, they must be committed to correcting and returning any incorrect data, and to providing updates as and when appropriate for their own project work at all stages requested by the database agency.
x. **The chair of a meeting should be selected for his/her chairing ability.**

**Recommendations:**

One of the criteria for election of at least two of the representatives on a Reference Group should be their chairing ability. Having two potential chairpersons means that if one is absent, there should still be one available.

xi. **Policy agreements on community participation need to be reached prior to NGO implementation; otherwise, the potential for such participation to be damaged by the actions of one or more NGOs is considerable.**

The issue of community participation - how much should agencies seek or demand - has raised more debate and disagreement than any other issue. There is no common approach. The smaller subgroups have on the whole managed to come to an agreement, though it is often a compromise; the larger the group, however, the vaguer the agreement and the more flexibility there is for agencies to operate in widely varying ways, with a greater potential for manipulation by local shuras and further compromise by agencies. This is an issue which needs to be taken up in a much wider forum and at a much higher level. Whether there is one right answer to be found may be another issue altogether.

Agencies are now pursuing varying policies, within the wide reaching agreements of the subgroups. This has led to problems for one large international NGO which is committed to increasing the level of free unskilled labour provided by a community. They have assured funding and good projects to implement; but their assistance is being rejected in a certain area because of the perceived difference between their policy and that of neighbouring agencies.

Shura representatives are demanding 100% assistance from the NGO in question which in turn is very reluctant to give up its own principles. This is unfortunate, especially given that this NGO is the only one offering a particular kind of assistance greatly needed in the area in question. It reflects the inability of the Group to tackle and resolve this issue which should rather be taken up by the wider community.

Ironically, one area for which there seemed to be a clear and definite policy has also now been shaken. The agriculture subgroup, with the encouragement of FAO, agreed a minimum price of Rs 3 per sapling distributed in the area. Some small amounts of trees were distributed in accordance with this policy. Then a large international NGO distributed 10,000 FAO saplings free of charge; they later answered that they had not known about the policy, although their representative participated in that particular discussion and although the guidelines had been distributed.
When the next NGO went into a nearby district to distribute its FAO saplings for Rs 3 each, it was eventually forced by the local people to distribute them for free - because they knew of the earlier free distribution. It may take some time to re-establish the principle.

It should be said, however, that a forum such as this Coordination Group is not the most appropriate one in which to make major policy decisions on behalf of agencies. The issue of community participation is an issue requiring training and director-level decision-making. The majority of the representatives participating in the Group's meetings are not qualified or authorised to make such decisions. Many are not aware of the issues at stake; training would be beneficial for all.

With the rapidly moving changes taking place in Afghanistan, this issue becomes even more pertinent. The ACBAR Health Subcommittee is currently tackling the question of introducing charges for services/medicines, acknowledging that greater self-sufficiency must be encouraged for the sake of the continuation of such services. Other sectors should be doing likewise.

Recommendations:

If any major policy change is to be effected, it would be done more smoothly and effectively with the active endorsement and enforcement of donors. On the level of the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group, it might be appropriate to hold a donors meeting to discuss the issue initially, with presentations made by a small number of NGOs who have tried to tackle the issue. If the donors endorse the principle, it should then go to the Group for discussion followed soon after (or preceded by) one or two 'custom-built' training sessions on the issue, organised by one of the training agencies and involving the policies and experiences of a few NGOs. Sectoral discussions would then need to follow to work out detailed sectoral policies.

On a wider scale, it would seem that a series of decision-making seminars would be appropriate for the community. Firstly, an overall commitment by donors and directors would need to be sought. Secondly, sectoral discussions (or a series of them) would need to be held to work out the details of any policies. Thirdly, the results would need to be shared (in different languages as appropriate) with all agencies working in Afghanistan plus all provincial local authorities.

The current political developments might give added stimulus and urgency to the discussions. Conversely, they might be used as an excuse to do nothing. There would need to be considerable will and energy on behalf of the UN, the coordinating bodies and those NGOs committed to the concept of enhanced community participation.
G. THE FUTURE OF THE EASTERN PAKTIA COORDINATION GROUP

The results of the Eastern Paktia Coordination Group ini are encouraging.

This report outlines the lessons learned and sets out a se practical recommendations. In order to build further coordination base already laid down, the Project Coordinat follow up on the recommendations; in addition, these findings will be summarised and circulated as appropriate to participating agencies, the UN, donors and other coordination fora.

There is a widespread will among the participating agencies for the Group to continue in its current format for at least another three months; during that time, a further assessment will be made to determine the longer-term future of the Group. Funding has been received to enable it to continue until 31 June 1992.

During that time, work will focus on setting up and standardising monitoring systems, in addition to continuing the ongoing coordination of proposals and implementation of assistance.