

Humanitarian Coordination in Protracted Conflict and the Evolution of Response Architecture in North East Nigeria from 2014 to 2018

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Abstract

Between 2014 and 2018 the coordination architecture for the North East Nigeria crisis grew from an Abuja-centred, government co-led sector system with a thin international presence into a layered response of sectors, field forums, humanitarian hubs and a pooled fund. The decisive changes followed a critical juncture in mid 2016, when mortality alerts and famine analysis prompted agency emergency declarations, a new federal emergency coordination centre and an appeal above one billion US dollars. Resource mobilisation, planning and displacement data became clear strengths. Growth in structures did not, however, produce common priorities or equal influence. Government institutions supplied mandate, access and continuity; international actors supplied surge capacity, finance and standards; national organisations were included in plans without commensurate influence over funding. Gaps persisted where mandates overlapped, actor mapping was incomplete, recovery remained the least funded sector and field realities were filtered through capital-level forums. These findings rest on a structured documentary analysis of 26 plans, monitoring reports, data products, evaluations and practitioner analyses published no later than 2019, with claims about performance or causation requiring two independent sources. From the case the article derives a diagnostic checklist, the Negotiated Coordination Settlement Framework, which probes six dimensions through observable indicators: explicit co-leadership, subnational capacity, inclusive participation, shared data standards, field-informed decision-making and transition preparedness. The checklist requires testing in further cases.

Keywords: humanitarian coordination; protracted conflict; North East Nigeria; sector coordination; localisation; affected-state leadership; humanitarian architecture

DOI:10.21590/ijtmh.05.03.457

1. Introduction

Coordination is the connective tissue of humanitarian action. When it works, assessments are shared, gaps are visible, duplication is reduced and scarce resources reach the people in greatest need; when it fails, agencies plant flags, information circulates without analysis and affected populations fall between mandates (Balcik et al., 2010; Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2018). The North East Nigeria crisis offers an unusually instructive case for studying how coordination arrangements form and change under pressure. The insurgency associated with Boko Haram escalated sharply after 2013 and, by the middle of the decade, had displaced more than two million people and placed millions more in need of assistance across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States (International Crisis Group, 2014; Thurston, 2018). For much of 2014 and 2015, however, the international humanitarian footprint was small, the response was led largely by federal and state authorities, and humanitarian funding to Nigeria remained modest by comparison with other crises of similar scale (Stirk & Spencer, 2015).

The transformation that followed was rapid. Reports of starvation and excess mortality in newly accessible towns in mid 2016 triggered a sequence of agency emergency declarations, a near tripling and then near quadrupling of humanitarian appeals, a high-level pledging conference in Oslo in February 2017, and the construction of an elaborate system of sectors, working groups, humanitarian hubs and pooled funding (MSF, 2016; OCHA, 2017; USAID, 2016). By 2018 the response architecture bore little resemblance to the arrangements of 2014. Yet the documentary record also shows that structural expansion did not resolve several underlying tensions: the relationship between government leadership and international coordination, the distance between Abuja-level forums and field realities in Maiduguri and beyond, the limited influence of national organisations, and the uneasy relationship between relief and recovery (Breckenmacher, 2019; Edwards, 2017).

This article examines how the coordination architecture in North East Nigeria evolved between 2014 and 2018 and what the experience reveals about managing protracted conflict in a federal state. Three questions guide the analysis. First, how did the response architecture change over the period, and which events drove each change? Second, which coordination functions performed well and where did parallel assessments, overlapping mandates or uneven participation create inefficiency? Third, which arrangements endured beyond the initial scale-up, and what lessons do they hold for durable coordination? The analysis avoids projecting later arrangements backwards, verifies the status of sector and working group mechanisms in each phase, and distinguishes national, state and field perspectives wherever the record allows (Pierson, 2000).

The article makes three contributions. Empirically, it assembles a phase-by-phase architecture map and milestone timeline drawn only from published records dated no later than 2019. Analytically, it treats coordination as a negotiated political and operational settlement among government institutions, United Nations agencies, international and national non-governmental organisations, donors and affected communities, rather than as a fixed organisational chart (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010). Conceptually, it derives from the case a diagnostic checklist, the Negotiated Coordination Settlement Framework, that specifies six dimensions of durable coordination and observable indicators for each, offered as an instrument for structured diagnosis that requires testing in further cases.

2. Conceptual and Literature Background

2.1 The cluster approach and its critics

The contemporary architecture of international humanitarian coordination rests on the cluster approach introduced through the 2005 humanitarian reform process. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee designated global lead agencies for each sector of response and asked them to act as providers of last resort, ensuring predictable leadership and accountability at country level (IASC, 2006). The subsequent Transformative Agenda refined the model, and the revised reference module sets out six core cluster functions: supporting service delivery, informing strategic decisions of the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team, planning and strategy development, advocacy, monitoring and reporting, and contingency planning and preparedness, with accountability to affected populations as a further responsibility (IASC, 2015).

Crucially, the module stresses that clusters should be activated only where national coordination capacity is insufficient and should be deactivated or transitioned as that capacity grows.

Evaluations have repeatedly found that clusters improve coverage and gap identification but struggle with inclusion, national ownership and the integration of local actors. The second phase evaluation of the cluster approach concluded that clusters had strengthened predictability and partnership among international actors while frequently sidelining national and local authorities and organisations, partly because meetings were conducted in English, in capitals and in technical vocabularies unfamiliar to local participants (Steets et al., 2010). Comparable gaps between the model's theory and its practice were identified in health and other sectors (Stumpfenhorst et al., 2011; Humphries, 2013). The health cluster experience in northern Uganda illustrates both the gains in information sharing that clusters can bring and the difficulty of sustaining coordination through national structures (Olu et al., 2015).

Recent work cautions against equating coordination with a single organisational form. In their ALNAP study of cluster practice, Knox Clarke and Campbell (2015) distinguish between coordination as information exchange, as harmonisation of activities and as joint decision-making, and their later analysis of the clusters shows that the last of these is rarely achieved (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2018). Seybolt (2009) similarly describes the humanitarian network as a complex adaptive system whose coordination emerges through repeated interaction rather than central command, while Moshtari and Gonçalves (2017) identify trust, complementary resources and shared goals as conditions for inter-organisational collaboration. These insights frame the Nigerian case as one in which coordination forms were adapted, contested and layered rather than simply installed.

2.2 Affected-state leadership in federal systems

International humanitarian law and policy assign primary responsibility for assisting people affected by crises to the state. Harvey (2009) argues that good humanitarian government requires affected states to lead, to set the regulatory framework for international assistance and to account for their performance, while international actors should support rather than substitute for state systems wherever states are willing and able to act. The cluster reference module embodies this logic in its emphasis on government co-leadership and on transition to national mechanisms

(IASC, 2015). In conflict settings, however, the state is frequently also a party to hostilities, and the line between support and complicity becomes harder to draw (Collinson & Elhawary, 2012).

Federal systems add a further layer. Responsibility for disaster management, displacement and service delivery is divided among federal agencies, state governments and local authorities, each with distinct mandates, budgets and political incentives. In Nigeria the National Emergency Management Agency operates a national disaster management framework, while State Emergency Management Agencies exist in some but not all states and vary considerably in resources (Mohammed, 2017). Analyses of the North East response have pointed to overlapping mandates among federal bodies and to tensions between federal and state authorities as factors that complicated leadership of the response (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2017; Brechenmacher, 2019). Comfort (2007) notes that effective crisis management depends on cognition, communication, coordination and control operating across organisational boundaries; in a federal system those boundaries are also constitutional and political.

The literature therefore suggests that the question in Nigeria was not whether government should lead, but which level of government led which function, how international actors were integrated into or alongside government structures, and how those arrangements shifted as the crisis evolved. This article treats such questions empirically rather than normatively, tracing how authority over coordination was negotiated between Abuja, the state capitals and international forums.

2.3 Humanitarian space, access and civil-military relations

Access is the precondition for coordination to matter. Collinson and Elhawary (2012) describe humanitarian space as shaped by the interplay of security conditions, political authority and the conduct of aid agencies themselves, and Hilhorst and Jansen (2010) characterise it as an arena in which actors continuously negotiate the terms of assistance. Research on aid delivery in insecure environments shows that agencies able to sustain presence combine principled commitments with pragmatic engagement with authorities and armed actors, and that acceptance, local staff and long-term relationships matter as much as security measures (Haver & Carter, 2016).

Civil-military coordination is especially consequential where the national armed forces control movement, screen populations and determine which areas are open. Guidance on the use of military assets and armed escorts treats them as a last resort because association with one party to a conflict can compromise the perceived neutrality of humanitarian actors and the protection of

the people they serve (Collinson & Elhawary, 2012). In North East Nigeria, documented debates over armed escorts, helicopter access and military-controlled garrison towns illustrate how access constraints shaped not only operational reach but also coordination priorities and inter-agency relations (Roberts, 2017; Brechenmacher, 2019). The present analysis therefore treats access as a structuring variable for coordination rather than as an external condition.

The literature also indicates that access constraints distort information. When assessments can only be conducted in accessible locations, during short visits or through intermediaries, the resulting data systematically underrepresent populations in the hardest-to-reach areas (Darcy et al., 2013). Coordination built on such data risks reproducing the geography of access as a geography of need.

2.4 Localisation and accountability to affected people

A large body of work argues that international humanitarian action underinvests in national and local responders. Ramalingam et al. (2013) found that partnership-based responses led by national organisations were often faster, more context-appropriate and more cost-effective, but that funding and coordination systems were designed around international agencies. Wall and Hedlund (2016) reviewed the localisation literature and identified recurring barriers including direct funding, risk transfer, participation in coordination and recognition of local leadership. The Grand Bargain agreed at the World Humanitarian Summit committed signatories to channel at least a quarter of humanitarian funding as directly as possible to local and national responders by the end of the decade and to include them in coordination mechanisms (Grand Bargain, 2016). Barbelet (2018) reframes the debate in terms of complementarity, arguing that the objective is a response that is as local as possible and as international as necessary.

Bennett et al. (2016) argue that the system has become too centralised around a few large agencies and must cede power to national actors and affected states, an argument that resonates in contexts like Nigeria, where a large middle-income state hosts a vibrant civil society but where international agencies dominated the architecture of the scale-up (ALNAP, 2018).

Accountability to affected people is the other side of the inclusion question. The Core Humanitarian Standard sets out commitments on participation, feedback and complaints, and the responsiveness of assistance to community priorities (CHS Alliance et al., 2014). Yet Brown and Donini (2014) concluded that putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action remained more rhetoric than reality, with feedback mechanisms often collecting information without

changing decisions. These standards provide the benchmarks against which the present study assesses representation of affected people in the Nigerian coordination system.

2.5 Historical institutionalism and phased change

The analytical lens of this article is historical institutionalism. Pierson (2000) argues that early choices in institutional development can generate increasing returns, making later change costly and channelling subsequent development along particular paths. Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) define critical junctures as relatively short periods during which structural constraints loosen and the choices of key actors have a disproportionate effect on later institutional trajectories. Together, these concepts suggest that the moments at which coordination arrangements were established in North East Nigeria, and the conditions under which they were established, would shape what endured.

Applied to humanitarian coordination, a historical institutional approach directs attention to sequence and timing: which arrangements preceded the scale-up, which were introduced at moments of acute crisis, and which became embedded through funding, staffing and routine. It also highlights that institutions can change through layering, where new structures are added on top of existing ones without displacing them, producing complex hybrids rather than clean replacements (Pierson, 2000). The Nigerian architecture, in which government-led coordination bodies, internationally led sectors and new pooled funding mechanisms coexisted, is a candidate example of such layering. Hilhorst (2018) further notes that protracted crises increasingly combine classical humanitarian logic with resilience-oriented approaches that engage state systems, a combination that creates new tensions over priorities and principles.

The approach is well suited to a desk-based design because humanitarian architecture leaves a dense documentary trail of plans, monitoring reports and evaluations whose publication dates allow change to be sequenced with confidence (Bowen, 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and corpus

The evidence base for this study is the written record that the North East Nigeria response produced about itself, read through a historical institutional case design. The case period runs from 2014 to

2018, and the anchor year for admitting documents is 2019: a record entered the analysis only if it had been published by the end of that year. Documents suit this purpose because they fix what an institution stated at a known date, can be compared across issuers and do not change in response to the researcher (Bowen, 2009). The design is documentary throughout, and it draws on published practitioner analyses, mission reports, evaluations and policy studies to read the perspectives of government, United Nations, international and national non-governmental actors, weighing each as one source among several and never as decisive on its own (Darcy et al., 2013). Situation and monitoring reports are treated as institutional products assembled under time pressure for several audiences at once rather than as neutral measurements, so every figure they carry is read alongside the purpose and date of the report that carries it (Finn & Oreglia, 2016).

Inclusion criteria were that a document addressed humanitarian coordination, planning, funding, access or displacement in North East Nigeria, or provided the conceptual standards against which coordination is assessed; that it was issued by an identifiable institution or author; and that its publication date could be established as no later than 2019. Table 1 registers every primary and grey document used as case evidence. The register holds 26 documents: six response plans, monitoring reports and fact sheets; two displacement and food security data products; two official government and intergovernmental records; five institutional statements and news releases; three evaluations and assessments; and eight practitioner and policy analyses. The conceptual frame, benchmarks and case background draw on a further 35 sources: four global standards and guidance documents, 13 global grey-literature studies, and 18 peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and academic monographs. Three categories of material were excluded: documents published after 2019, including later evaluations, after-action reflections and year-end reports covering the case period; documents whose issuer or publication date could not be verified; and press items other than those recording the dates and amounts of announced appeals and pledges, which were in turn cross-checked against institutional records.

3.2 Coding, verification and triangulation

Coding proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, every document was dated and assigned to one of three analytical phases: recognition and limited reach, from 2014 to mid 2016; rapid international scale-up, from mid 2016 to early 2017; and consolidation of sector coordination and planning, from 2017 to 2018. In the second stage, passages were coded deductively against eight

dimensions drawn from the literature, defined in Table 2 together with an example indicator for each (IASC, 2015; Harvey, 2009; Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2015). In the third stage, coded passages were compared across documents to identify convergence, divergence and silence, and inductive notes were added where a passage fitted no dimension cleanly.

Table 1. Corpus register of primary and grey documents used as case evidence, in order of publication

Issuer	Document (short form)	Date	Document type	Analytical use
International Crisis Group	Curbing violence in Nigeria (II)	2014	Policy analysis	Escalation of the insurgency; state of emergency
OCHA	Strategic response plan 2014 to 2016	2014	Response plan	Early sector structure; government co-leads; targets
Development Initiatives	Crisis briefing on Nigeria IDPs	2015	Funding analysis	Funding levels in 2014 and 2015; absence of a pooled fund
InterAction	NGO mission report on northeastern Nigeria	2016	Practitioner analysis	Leadership change; Abuja and field divergence; escorts
International Crisis Group	Boko Haram on the back foot?	2016	Policy analysis	Military counter-offensive; fragmentation of the insurgency
World Bank	Recovery and peace building assessment	2016	Assessment	Damage and loss estimates
MSF	Bama press release	22 June 2016	Institutional statement	Mortality alert; trigger of scale-up
USAID	Lake Chad Basin fact sheet #12, FY2016	2016	Fact sheet	Agency Level 3 declarations; food security figures; appeals
WHO Regional Office for Africa	Response review news release	3 December 2016	Institutional statement	Grade 3 declaration; incident management; Maiduguri hub
FEWS NET	Famine alert for Bama	13 December 2016	Food security analysis	Likely famine in 2016; inaccessible areas

Issuer	Document (short form)	Date	Document type	Analytical use
UN News	Launch of the 2017 appeal	December 2016	News release	Appeal size; move of the response centre to Borno
IOM	Displacement Tracking Matrix Round XIV	January 2017	Displacement data	Coverage of tracking; partnership with NEMA and SEMAs
OCHA	Oslo conference outcome	24 February 2017	Institutional statement	Pledges and co-hosts
Emergency Coordination Centre	Oslo conference report	2017	Government record	Federal coordination bodies; government account of the crisis
United Nations Security Council	Resolution 2349	31 March 2017	Intergovernmental record	Regional recognition of the crisis
MSF (Edwards)	Emergency Gap case study	2017	Evaluation	Leadership, mapping, access and funding delays
Humanitarian Practice Network	Humanitarian Exchange 70 on the Lake Chad Basin	2017	Practitioner analysis	Recognition, reticence and delayed response
Humanitarian Practice Network (Roberts)	Raising the alert in Borno	2017	Practitioner analysis	Timing of evidence; escorts; helicopter access
SWP (Mohammed)	Internal displacement and governance challenges	2017	Policy analysis	Federal and state mandates; camp figures
OCHA	Periodic monitoring report, 2017	2018	Monitoring report	Pooled fund; hubs; sector funding; claimed results
OCHA	Periodic monitoring report, January to June 2018	2018	Monitoring report	Forums; sector matrix; strategies; localisation targets
UNDP	Berlin conference news release	4 September 2018	Institutional statement	Multi-year pledges
OCHA	Situation update on the multi-year plan	January 2019	Situation report	Multi-year strategy closing the case period
USAID	Lake Chad Basin fact sheet #3, FY2019	2019	Fact sheet	Multi-year requirements and targets

Issuer	Document (short form)	Date	Document type	Analytical use
WFP Office of Evaluation	Corporate emergency response evaluation	2019	Evaluation	Speed and quality of scale-up; prioritisation
Carnegie Endowment (Brechenmacher)	Stabilizing northeast Nigeria	2019	Policy analysis	Overlapping mandates; state and federal tension; returns

Table 2. Coding frame: dimensions, definitions and example indicators

Dimension	Definition	Example indicator in the corpus
Leadership legitimacy	Recognition of an actor's authority to set priorities, whether conferred by designation or earned through presence	Designation, tenure and location of humanitarian leadership; reported confidence in forums
National-international role sharing	Division of coordination functions between government and international actors	Government counterpart named for each sector
Sector coordination	Status and functioning of sectors, working groups and inter-sector forums	Activation status; existence and attendance of field forums
Information management	Production, sharing and return of common data and analysis	Displacement tracking coverage; completeness of actor mapping
Humanitarian access	Conditions under which assistance could reach affected people	Escort requirements; areas reported accessible; air access approvals
Resource allocation	Volume, timing and direction of funding	Appeal coverage; sector funding shares; pooled fund allocations
Localisation	Participation and resourcing of national and local actors	National NGOs appealing; local partner funding targets
Relief, recovery and state systems	Links between humanitarian action, recovery planning and state institutions	Recovery funding share; returns frameworks; nexus mechanisms

Coding was carried out by a single analyst. Every quantitative figure and every dated event was then re-checked against its issuing source in a separate verification pass, and figures that could not

be matched to the issuing document were removed. Triangulation followed explicit rules. A claim about a number, date or institutional role entered the analysis only if it appeared in at least one institutional record. As applied here, claims about performance or causation required support from at least two independent sources, preferably of different types; where a performance or causal finding rests on one source, the text and Table 4 label it single-source. Where sources conflicted, the conflict was recorded together with its nature and the basis for resolution, and where no documentary basis for resolution existed the divergence was reported rather than resolved (Table 5). The study uses contribution language rather than attribution language: where several actors and factors plausibly influenced an outcome, the analysis describes association and plausible contribution (Bowen, 2009). Consistent with good practice for research on conflict settings, the analysis remains at an institutional level and omits operational detail on routes, security procedures and named individuals (Haver & Carter, 2016).

3.3 Sensitivity to the anchor-year boundary

The anchor-year gate protects the analysis against hindsight, because it reconstructs what was on the record when arrangements were being made rather than what later reflection concluded (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). The gate also has costs, and they fall unevenly across the findings. The phase sequence, the dating of milestones, the critical juncture of mid 2016, the layering of new structures over old ones and the funding pattern for 2017 and 2018 rest on contemporaneous dated records and would not be expected to change if later documents were admitted. Judgements on durability are more exposed: the status column of Table 6, the assessment of returns policy, the fate of localisation targets and the effect of the multi-year strategy could each be revised by later evaluations, after-action reviews or year-end reports. Findings about feedback mechanisms and state-level forums are findings about the published record. Absence from the dated record is not evidence of absence of practice, since much coordination work is never written up for publication (Bowen, 2009; Finn & Oreglia, 2016).

4. The North East Nigeria Case, 2014 to 2018

The insurgency in North East Nigeria has roots in the late 2000s, but violence escalated markedly after 2013, when a state of emergency was declared in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe and the insurgents expanded from urban attacks to the seizure and control of rural territory (International

Crisis Group, 2014; Thurston, 2018). By early 2015 large parts of Borno were outside government control. A counter-offensive by the Nigerian military, supported by neighbouring states through the Multinational Joint Task Force, recaptured many towns during 2015 and 2016, but the insurgency fragmented rather than ended and continued to mount attacks on towns, roads and camps (International Crisis Group, 2016). The crisis was regional, affecting Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and was recognised by the United Nations Security Council in a dedicated resolution on the Lake Chad Basin in 2017 (United Nations Security Council, 2017).

The humanitarian consequences were severe. InterAction (2016) reported that more than two million people had been internally displaced in Nigeria by early 2016, that approximately 92 per cent of internally displaced people lived among host communities rather than in camps, and that some three million of the seven million people in the most affected states were in insecure or inaccessible areas. Displacement tracking by IOM began in North East Nigeria in September 2014 in partnership with the National Emergency Management Agency and State Emergency Management Agencies (IOM, 2017). In Borno, the state emergency management agency registered 11 camps holding 111,388 people in December 2016, fewer than one in ten of the displaced people in the Maiduguri metropolitan area (Mohammed, 2017). Health risks in displacement settings, including communicable disease, malnutrition and psychological distress, were well documented in the regional literature (Owoaje et al., 2016), and an audit of camp health provision in Nigeria later found uneven compliance with minimum standards (Ekezie et al., 2019). Exposure to the insurgency has been associated with increased childhood wasting in affected areas (Dunn, 2018).

The damage to public infrastructure and livelihoods was correspondingly large. The Recovery and Peace Building Assessment launched in January 2016 by the Federal Government with the European Union, the United Nations and the World Bank estimated physical damage of about 9.2 billion US dollars and accumulated output losses of about 8.3 billion US dollars across the affected states, with roughly two-thirds of the damage concentrated in Borno (Mohammed, 2017; World Bank, 2016). By the end of 2017, the humanitarian needs analysis underpinning the 2018 plan identified 7.7 million people in need across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (OCHA, 2018b).

Institutionally, the response involved a crowded field. At federal level the National Emergency Management Agency held the principal disaster management mandate, while other federal bodies

dealt with refugees and displacement, creating overlapping responsibilities (Mohammed, 2017). In September 2016 the Federal Government established an Inter-Ministerial Task Force with an Emergency Coordination Centre as its operational arm (Edwards, 2017; Emergency Coordination Centre, 2017). A Presidential Committee on the North East Initiative was inaugurated in October 2016 as the intended principal coordination body for recovery (Brechenmacher, 2019). At state level, Borno created a dedicated Ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement in 2015, Adamawa's emergency management agency board was chaired by the Deputy Governor, and Yobe relied on an ad hoc committee chaired by the Deputy Governor (Mohammed, 2017).

5. Findings

5.1 Phase one, 2014 to mid 2016: recognition and limited reach

In the first phase the response was predominantly national. The 2014 to 2016 Strategic Response Plan for Nigeria framed humanitarian needs across the Sahelian north, with the north-east conflict as one component alongside food insecurity, malnutrition and epidemics, and it described a coordination structure of nine humanitarian sectors co-led by government ministries and United Nations agencies, with the National Emergency Management Agency as the principal government interlocutor (OCHA, 2014). The plan's target population of 4.2 million in the three north-eastern states under emergency rule sat within a national figure of 8.3 million. The international presence was small: total humanitarian funding to Nigeria was 44.3 million US dollars in 2014, the 2015 plan requested 100.3 million US dollars and was about ten per cent funded in April 2015, and no country-based pooled fund operated (Stirk & Spencer, 2015). The same analysis noted that federal and state governments provided most of the assistance, so the international plan concentrated on areas where government capacity was limited.

Leadership arrangements were formally upgraded during this phase but remained thin in practice. The Resident Coordinator was designated Humanitarian Coordinator in November 2014 and a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator was appointed in January 2015, yet InterAction (2016) described the response through 2015 as grossly insufficient. The MSF Emergency Gap case study reports that there was no consistent, emergency-experienced humanitarian coordinator from 2014 to 2016 and that those in post had to balance development relationships with the government against pressure to move into emergency mode (Edwards, 2017). The same study records that

official camps run by the national and state emergency management agencies held roughly 100,000 people in 2015 but that support was not extended to the much larger population outside camps, and that the state agency lacked the resources to coordinate effectively.

The documentary record converges on two drivers of limited reach. The first was access: outside Maiduguri, most areas were effectively inaccessible through 2015, the Maiduguri airport reopened only in August 2015, and military authorities restricted movement (Edwards, 2017). The second was recognition. Several sources describe official reluctance to acknowledge the scale of the crisis and a reticence among humanitarian leaders to challenge that position (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2017; Edwards, 2017). InterAction (2016) added that donors had been reluctant to portray the crisis accurately, partly to avoid friction with the government.

The arrival of a new Humanitarian Coordinator in January 2016 was described as a sea change, and the strengthening of the OCHA office was welcomed, though participants questioned why it had taken so long (InterAction, 2016). By April 2016 a joint assessment had raised the estimate of children with severe acute malnutrition from 56,000 to 244,000, yet large-scale scale-up did not immediately follow and the 2016 appeal was only 12 per cent funded by April (Edwards, 2017). The phase therefore ended with a recognised but under-resourced crisis and a coordination system whose centre of gravity remained in Abuja.

5.2 Phase two, mid 2016 to early 2017: international scale-up

The second phase was triggered by a convergence of evidence and attention in mid 2016. On 22 June 2016 MSF reported that some 24,000 displaced people in Bama were in a dire health situation, that 19 per cent of screened children had severe acute malnutrition, and that 1,233 graves had been dug near the camp within the previous year (MSF, 2016). The Ministry of Health declared a State of Nutrition Emergency in Borno on 27 June 2016 (Edwards, 2017). Roberts (2017) argues that the crisis had not been hidden, noting that information was available at least two months before the press release, but that its findings had been buried in technical language.

Agency emergency declarations followed in quick succession. Between late July and mid August 2016, FAO, WFP, WHO, UNHCR and IOM declared internal Level 3 emergencies for North East Nigeria (USAID, 2016). WHO's internal Grade 3 declaration in August 2016 activated an incident management system, brought surge staff and established an emergency hub in Maiduguri (WHO Regional Office for Africa, 2016). These were agency-level designations rather than a system-

wide activation, and the MSF case study records that the cluster system was only partially used and that non-United Nations agencies were not formally brought under the Humanitarian Coordinator's leadership (Edwards, 2017). The Nigerian response therefore scaled up through sectors co-led with government, not through a formally activated cluster system.

Food security analysis reinforced the urgency. A Cadre Harmonisé analysis in August 2016 estimated that more than 4.4 million people in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe faced acute food insecurity, including about 65,000 at famine levels (USAID, 2016). In December 2016 FEWS NET concluded that famine had likely occurred in Bama and Banki during 2016, that at least 2,000 famine-related deaths might have occurred in Bama between January and September, and that famine might be ongoing in inaccessible areas of Borno (FEWS NET, 2016).

Government coordination was reorganised in parallel. The Inter-Ministerial Task Force and its Emergency Coordination Centre were established in September 2016, and official rhetoric shifted from denial to emergency (Edwards, 2017). The Emergency Coordination Centre (2017) described itself as the operational arm of the task force and reported that a Humanitarian Coordination Working Group had been established to facilitate civil-military discussions. The 2017 appeal, launched in December 2016, sought more than one billion US dollars for Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, and the United Nations described the move of the response's centre of gravity from Abuja to Borno as a step that eased access to vulnerable people (UN News, 2016). The Oslo Humanitarian Conference on 24 February 2017, co-hosted by Norway, Nigeria, Germany and the United Nations, secured 672 million US dollars in pledges from 14 donors, including 458 million for 2017 (OCHA, 2017).

5.3 Phase three, 2017 to 2018: consolidation of sector coordination and planning

The third phase saw consolidation of the architecture that had been improvised during the scale-up. The Nigeria Humanitarian Fund, announced at Oslo, became operational in May 2017 and by the end of the year had disbursed 24 million US dollars through two standard allocations to 22 partners for 37 projects, with 16 donors contributing 44 million US dollars (OCHA, 2018a). Five humanitarian hubs were completed in Borno, at Maiduguri, Gwoza, Bama, Ngala and Dikwa, to support last-mile delivery and local coordination. A peer-to-peer support mission in June 2017 aimed to strengthen Humanitarian Country Team leadership, including on protection and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The 2017 monitoring report claimed that famine

had been averted, a cholera outbreak contained, and more than five million people reached with assistance, while also recording that recovery activities were held back by very low funding (OCHA, 2018a).

By 2018 the formal architecture was elaborate. The mid-year monitoring report for 2018 was prepared by an inter-sector coordination group on behalf of the Humanitarian Country Team and documented an Operational Humanitarian Country Team in Maiduguri, operational and national inter-sector working groups, and a full sector structure with United Nations coordinators and government counterparts (OCHA, 2018b). Between March and June 2018 the Humanitarian Country Team endorsed strategies on the centrality of protection, advocacy and access, a civil-military coordination guidance, and a gender strategy, and established a task force to operationalise the New Way of Working linking humanitarian and development action. Table 3 summarises the architecture year by year, distinguishing what the record shows from what it does not.

Table 3. Year-by-year coordination architecture map, North East Nigeria, 2014 to 2018

Year	Strategic leadership	Sector or working group status	Government role in coordination	Principal driver of change
2014	Resident Coordinator designated Humanitarian Coordinator in November	Nine national sectors co-led by ministries and UN agencies under a Sahel-wide plan	NEMA principal interlocutor; SEMAs run official camps	Escalation of insurgency and displacement
2015	Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator appointed in January; thin emergency leadership	Sectors convened mainly in Abuja; limited field coordination	Federal and state authorities provide most assistance	Military counter-offensive; limited access outside Maiduguri
2016	New Humanitarian Coordinator in January; agency internal Level 3 declarations from July	Sectors scale up; cluster system only partially used; no system-wide activation	Inter-Ministerial Task Force and Emergency Coordination Centre created in September; PCNI inaugurated in October	Bama mortality alert; famine analysis

Year	Strategic leadership	Sector or working group status	Government role in coordination	Principal driver of change
2017	Humanitarian Country Team strengthened after peer support; Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator in Maiduguri	Sector system consolidated; humanitarian hubs in Borno; pooled fund operational from May	Government co-hosts Oslo conference; ministries co-lead sectors	Oslo pledges; famine prevention
2018	Operational Humanitarian Country Team in Maiduguri; strategies on protection, access, civil-military coordination	Operational and national inter-sector working groups; full sector matrix with government counterparts	NEMA counterpart for shelter, camp coordination and coordination; government coordination described as fragmented	Transition pressure; returns; nexus agenda

The record thus shows a transition from a nationally led, Abuja-centred sector system with minimal international capacity to a layered architecture in which government-led bodies, internationally led sectors with government counterparts and new financing instruments coexisted. Consistent with the layering concept, earlier structures were rarely abolished; they were supplemented (Pierson, 2000). The multi-year humanitarian response strategy launched in 2019, co-launched by the Government and the United Nations with a 2019 requirement of 848 million US dollars and a target of 6.2 million people, marked the shift to multi-year planning that closed the case period (USAID, 2019; OCHA, 2019).

5.4 Leadership legitimacy and national-international role sharing

The documents reveal a persistent division of labour in which government institutions supplied mandate, access and continuity while international actors supplied surge capacity, finance, technical standards and global coordination mechanisms. Government co-leadership of sectors was a structural feature from the outset; the 2014 plan already described sectors co-led by ministries and United Nations agencies (OCHA, 2014), and by 2018 most sectors listed a federal ministry as counterpart, with the National Emergency Management Agency as counterpart for shelter and non-food items, camp coordination, response and recovery planning, and general coordination (OCHA, 2018b). This arrangement differs from the standard cluster model, in which

government co-leadership is an aspiration and transition goal rather than a starting point (IASC, 2015).

Formal co-leadership did not, however, guarantee coherent authority. The 2018 monitoring report itself described government coordination at all levels as fragmented and multi-layered (OCHA, 2018b). Brechenmacher (2019) reports that many institutions held overlapping mandates, that the Borno state government resisted federal coordination efforts, and that state and local actors often felt insufficiently consulted by federal bodies. Mohammed (2017) documents overlap and tension between the national emergency agency and the federal body responsible for refugees and displacement, though coordination reportedly improved after a leadership change in 2015. These accounts converge on the finding that the question was less whether government led than which level and which institution led which function.

International leadership also faced legitimacy questions. The MSF case study describes a Humanitarian Country Team in Abuja that was at times divided and resistant to moving into emergency mode in order to protect relationships with government (Edwards, 2017), and the Humanitarian Exchange issue on the Lake Chad Basin attributes part of the delayed response to humanitarian leaders' reticence to challenge the official position (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2017). Conversely, the arrival of new leadership in 2016, the placement of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator in Maiduguri, and the 2017 peer support mission are each associated in the record with improved functioning (InterAction, 2016; OCHA, 2018a). Leadership legitimacy, in short, was earned through presence and responsiveness rather than conferred by designation, a pattern consistent with the literature on humanitarian coordination as relational rather than hierarchical (Seybolt, 2009).

5.5 Coordination functions: what worked and where inefficiency arose

Assessed against the six core functions of the reference module, the record suggests uneven performance (IASC, 2015). Resource mobilisation was the most visibly successful function after mid 2016: appeals grew from under 300 million US dollars in 2016 to over one billion for 2017, the Oslo and Berlin conferences generated large multi-year pledges, and the pooled fund provided a flexible instrument (USAID, 2016; OCHA, 2017; UNDP, 2018). Advocacy was effective at decisive moments, notably when public alerts and famine analysis in 2016 shifted attention,

although the record indicates that effective advocacy came from outside the formal coordination system as often as from within it (MSF, 2016; Roberts, 2017).

Planning and strategy development improved substantially, culminating in a multi-year strategy and a set of thematic strategies endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team in 2018 (OCHA, 2018b). Displacement tracking provided a common data backbone: IOM's rounds covered 762 wards in 108 local government areas across six states by early 2017, in partnership with national and state emergency agencies and the Nigerian Red Cross (IOM, 2017). Monitoring and reporting were institutionalised through periodic monitoring reports, dashboards and funding overviews (OCHA, 2018b). By contrast, gap analysis was hampered by incomplete actor mapping and over-claiming. The MSF case study reports that ministry-led working groups failed to map actors accurately, that OCHA's mapping of who was doing what and where was incomplete, and that competitive flag-planting was widespread; more than 130 organisations claimed some response, but only 22 were recognised as operational in February 2017 (Edwards, 2017). Table 4 summarises these judgements and their evidential basis.

Table 4. Performance of core coordination functions, 2014 to 2018, with evidential basis and strength of evidence

Function	Assessment	Evidence of strength	Evidence of weakness	Strength of evidence
Resource mobilisation	Strong after mid 2016	Appeals above one billion US dollars; Oslo and Berlin pledges; pooled fund operational from 2017	Early appeals poorly funded; recovery planning least funded in 2017 and 2018	Strong: several institutional funding records
Advocacy	Effective at critical moments	Public mortality alerts and famine analysis shifted attention in 2016	Early reticence to contest official narrative	Moderate: primary alerts plus practitioner analyses
Planning and strategy	Improving	Annual plans; thematic strategies in 2018; multi-year strategy from 2019	Planning centred on Abuja during 2014 and 2015	Strong: dated plans and monitoring reports

Function	Assessment	Evidence of strength	Evidence of weakness	Strength of evidence
Information management	Mixed	Displacement tracking with national agencies; monitoring dashboards	Incomplete actor mapping; data from accessible areas only	Moderate: institutional data plus two practitioner accounts
Gap analysis	Weak to moderate	Hubs and sector reporting improved coverage in Borno	Over-claiming of coverage; duplication and gaps reported	Moderate; over-claiming figures single-source
Standards and accountability	Weak	Strategies on protection and gender endorsed in 2018	Limited documented feedback mechanisms linked to decisions	Moderate: monitoring report plus policy analysis; absence of record, not of practice

Inefficiency arose most clearly where assessment and reporting requirements multiplied. InterAction (2016) reported that coordination information was either lost or not collected and that little analysis was fed back to those who supplied it, and it observed a structural mismatch in which most sector expertise was in the field while meetings were held in Abuja. Edwards (2017) records that donor funding procedures delayed the scale-up of international organisations by four to five months, a single-source finding, and Maunder et al. (2019) found that WFP's rapid scale-up was impressive but that the delivery of a high-quality response lagged behind. These findings indicate that the growth of coordination structures increased the transaction costs of participation without consistently increasing the analytical value returned to participants.

5.6 Access, insecurity and the divergence between Abuja and the field

Insecurity and shifting territorial control shaped coordination at every stage. In 2015 the military ruled out access to many areas under its control, and humanitarian contact with the insurgents was not possible (Edwards, 2017). In early 2016, agencies debated whether to accept armed escorts to reach newly accessible towns; NGOs expressed grave concern about the United Nations' intention to use escorts in Borno and urged discussion at the Humanitarian Country Team using inter-agency

guidance (InterAction, 2016). Roberts (2017) reports that escorts were mandatory for travel outside Maiduguri, that NGOs refused them on neutrality grounds until June 2016, and that helicopter access with army approval began in August 2016, often allowing only brief visits. The endorsement of civil-military coordination guidance by the Humanitarian Country Team in April 2018 formalised principles that had been negotiated case by case for two years (OCHA, 2018b).

Access constraints also produced a divergence between Abuja-level and field-level coordination. InterAction (2016) recommended moving the sectoral centre of gravity to Maiduguri and warned against importing the full cluster structure. The MSF case study records low confidence in coordination in Maiduguri, with several major operational actors attending rarely because they regarded the process as unproductive and the data as unreliable (Edwards, 2017); this judgement is single-source, although it is consistent with the earlier InterAction account of a mismatch between field expertise and Abuja meetings. The establishment of an Operational Humanitarian Country Team and operational inter-sector group in Maiduguri by 2018 represents the institutional response to this divergence, though attendance targets for these forums were not met in the first half of 2018 (OCHA, 2018b).

Coordination differed among the three states in ways the record documents only partially. Borno, the epicentre, concentrated the humanitarian hubs, the largest displacement and the most complex access environment; its state government pursued an assertive reconstruction and returns agenda through a dedicated ministry and, according to Brechenmacher (2019), resisted federal coordination, a single-source characterisation. Adamawa and Yobe experienced lower levels of insecurity during the later phases and were where longer-term governance programming first began (Brechenmacher, 2019). Adamawa's emergency agency board and Yobe's ad hoc committee were both chaired by Deputy Governors (Mohammed, 2017). The available record supports the conclusion that coordination was most international and most contested in Borno, and more state-led and recovery-oriented in Adamawa and Yobe, but it does not permit fine-grained comparison of forum performance across the three states.

5.7 Funding flows, localisation and accountability to affected people

Funding flows shaped which priorities were implemented. In both 2017 and 2018 the best-funded sectors were nutrition, logistics and food security, while response and recovery planning was the least funded sector for a second consecutive year, receiving eight per cent of requirements in 2017

(OCHA, 2018a, 2018b). By 30 June 2018 the 2018 plan had received 490.9 million US dollars, or 46.8 per cent of its 1.05 billion requirement, including an estimated 185 million carried over from 2017 (OCHA, 2018b). United States humanitarian assistance alone rose from virtually nothing in 2014 to 291 million US dollars committed for fiscal year 2017 (Brechenmacher, 2019). This pattern is consistent with a response that prioritised life-saving assistance, as WFP's evaluation also recommended, but it left the recovery agenda that the government emphasised chronically under-resourced (Mauder et al., 2019).

Localisation remained limited. Of the agencies appealing through the 2018 plan, 21 were national NGOs and 31 international NGOs, but the plan's target of ten local partners receiving funding through the coordination mechanism had not been met by mid-year, and the same report noted limited institutional capacity among predominantly local organisations in key local government areas (OCHA, 2018b). The pooled fund was the main channel through which national organisations could access international funding, but published summaries for 2017 do not disaggregate allocations by partner type (OCHA, 2018a). The MSF case study's observation that many national staff lacked humanitarian training points to capacity gaps that the scale-up did little to address systematically (Edwards, 2017). Measured against the Grand Bargain commitment to channel funding as directly as possible to local and national responders, the Nigerian response through 2018 shows formal inclusion in plans without commensurate influence over resources (Grand Bargain, 2016; Barbelet, 2018).

Representation of affected people through feedback and accountability mechanisms is thinly documented. The 2018 monitoring report recommended stronger community engagement and accountability to affected populations but did not describe a functioning system-wide feedback mechanism (OCHA, 2018b). Brechenmacher (2019) reports that many returns in 2018 were not fully voluntary or were based on misleading information, and that a Return Strategy and Policy Framework was signed by the Borno governor and the Humanitarian Coordinator in August 2018 following concerns about premature returns. The finding that many returns were not fully voluntary is single-source in this corpus. Because the analysis can speak only to what was published, the thin record of feedback mechanisms is a finding about documentation rather than proof that no feedback practice existed (Section 3.3). With that qualification, these accounts suggest that the voice of affected people entered coordination mainly through protection advocacy

rather than through routine feedback loops, consistent with the broader finding that accountability commitments often remain rhetorical (Brown & Donini, 2014; CHS Alliance et al., 2014).

5.8 Contradictory evidence and its resolution

Following the triangulation rules set out in Section 3.2, the analysis recorded points at which sources disagreed and the basis on which each disagreement was handled. The most significant divergence concerns the timing and causes of the delayed scale-up. Government-affiliated sources characterise the crisis as largely overlooked before 2016 and present the 2016 reorganisation as decisive (Emergency Coordination Centre, 2017), whereas NGO and independent analyses emphasise that evidence of extreme need was available earlier and that both official reluctance and humanitarian reticence contributed to delay (Roberts, 2017; Humanitarian Practice Network, 2017). Table 5 summarises the principal divergences, classifies each as definitional, temporal, geographic or unexplained, and records the treatment applied.

Table 5. Contradictory evidence recorded in the corpus, nature of divergence and basis of resolution

Issue	Sources	Divergent accounts	Nature of divergence	Treatment
Timing of recognition	Emergency Coordination Centre (2017) versus Roberts (2017), Humanitarian Practice Network (2017) and Edwards (2017)	Crisis overlooked before 2016 versus information available earlier but not acted upon	Unexplained; interpretive	Both retained; analysis reports contribution of several factors rather than a single cause
Size of 2017 appeal	UN News (2016) versus Edwards (2017)	National plan above one billion US dollars versus larger figures that include regional plans	Definitional and geographic	National plan figure used; regional totals excluded from national comparisons

Issue	Sources	Divergent accounts	Nature of divergence	Treatment
Pooled fund start date	OCHA (2018a)	Operational in May 2017 versus June 2017 within the same summary	Unexplained	Earlier date from monitoring report used; discrepancy noted
Camp population share	Edwards (2017) versus Mohammed (2017)	Under 100,000 in official camps in 2015 versus 111,388 in Borno camps in late 2016	Temporal and geographic	Treated as different dates and scopes; not reconciled into a single figure
Effect of stabilisation agenda	Brechenmacher (2019), reporting state and humanitarian positions	Returns as recovery progress versus returns as premature and politically driven	Unexplained; substantive	Divergence reported; no documentary basis to resolve in favour of either

The handling of these divergences reflects a deliberate choice not to select the version that offers the strongest narrative. The figure for the 2017 appeal illustrates the risk: the MSF case study cites a substantially larger total than the national plan because it aggregates regional requirements, and adopting it uncritically would overstate the growth of the national response (Edwards, 2017; Emergency Coordination Centre, 2017).

6. The Negotiated Coordination Settlement Framework as a Diagnostic Checklist

The findings suggest that coordination in North East Nigeria is best understood as a negotiated settlement among actors with different sources of authority: government institutions holding sovereign mandate and control over access, international agencies holding finance and technical standards, national organisations holding local knowledge and acceptance, and affected communities whose consent and priorities give the response its legitimacy (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010; Harvey, 2009). Settlements of this kind are durable when they are explicit, when each party's contribution is recognised, and when they can adapt as the crisis moves between acute and protracted phases. Drawing on the six lessons the record supports, the article derives from the case a diagnostic checklist, named the Negotiated Coordination Settlement Framework, with six

dimensions, each linked to observable indicators. The instrument is case-derived: it organises what one response revealed into questions an analyst or coordination team can ask of another, and it is not offered as a general validated framework. Its dimensions and indicators require testing in further cases before claims about their wider applicability can be made.

The first dimension, explicit co-leadership, captures whether the division of roles between government and international actors is written down, at which level of government, and for which functions. The Nigerian record shows that co-leadership existed on paper from 2014 but that authority remained fragmented (OCHA, 2014, 2018b). The second dimension, subnational capacity, concerns whether state emergency agencies and line ministries have the resources and mandate to coordinate in their territory, a gap documented throughout the period (Mohammed, 2017). The third, inclusive participation, measures whether national NGOs and local civil society participate in decision-making forums and receive funding, not merely whether they appear in plans (Barbelet, 2018).

The fourth dimension, shared data standards, addresses whether assessments, displacement tracking and activity mapping use common definitions and are returned to participants as analysis, the area where the Nigerian response made notable progress through displacement tracking but continued to struggle with actor mapping (IOM, 2017; Edwards, 2017). The fifth, field-informed decision-making, concerns whether strategic forums are located near operations and whether field coordination outputs demonstrably shape capital-level priorities (InterAction, 2016). The sixth, transition preparedness, measures whether the system plans for movement between acute response and recovery, including funding for recovery and principled frameworks for returns (Levine & Mosel, 2014; Brechenmacher, 2019). Table 6 sets out indicators for each dimension and the corresponding status in the Nigerian record by 2018.

The checklist is anchored in a construct that the coordination literature already treats as central: decision rights, meaning who may decide, at which tier, and on what evidence. Explicit co-leadership asks who holds the right to decide each function; subnational capacity and field-informed decision-making ask at which tier of government and of the humanitarian system those decisions are taken; shared data standards ask on what evidence they rest. Harvey (2009) locates the primary right to decide with the affected state, the reference module ties co-leadership and transition to the same question (IASC, 2015), Knox Clarke and Campbell (2018) show that clusters

rarely reach joint decision-making, and Darcy et al. (2013) show how weakly evidence is linked to humanitarian decisions. Reading the six dimensions as probes of decision rights makes the checklist comparable with instruments built for other crises rather than a free-standing model.

Table 6. Negotiated Coordination Settlement Framework as a diagnostic checklist: dimensions, indicators and status in North East Nigeria by 2018

Dimension	Indicators	Status by 2018 in the documentary record
Explicit co-leadership	Written terms of reference naming government and international co-leads by function and level; joint endorsement of plans	Sector matrix lists government counterparts; plan co-launched by government; authority described as fragmented
Subnational capacity	State agency budget and staffing; state-level coordination forums meeting regularly; state co-chairing of field forums	State agencies in all three states; resources limited; state forums documented unevenly
Inclusive participation	Share of forum seats and pooled fund allocations held by national NGOs; meetings held in accessible languages and locations	21 national NGOs in appeal; local funding target unmet at mid 2018
Shared data standards	Common displacement and needs datasets; complete actor mapping; analysis returned to contributors	Displacement tracking with national agencies; actor mapping incomplete
Field-informed decision-making	Strategic forum based near operations; proportion of priorities originating from field forums; attendance at field forums	Operational forums in Maiduguri; attendance targets unmet in first half of 2018
Transition preparedness	Funding share for recovery; agreed returns principles; joint humanitarian and development outcomes	Recovery least funded in 2017 and 2018; returns framework signed in 2018; nexus task force created

The checklist differs from standard cluster performance monitoring in two respects. It treats government and subnational capacity as dimensions of coordination performance rather than as external context, reflecting the reference module's own logic that clusters should support and

transition to national systems (IASC, 2015). And it measures influence, through funding shares, forum location and the origin of priorities, rather than mere presence. This emphasis responds to the finding that the North East Nigeria response achieved formal inclusion without commensurate influence (OCHA, 2018b). The indicators are designed to be observable from routine coordination records, so that the checklist can be applied retrospectively, as here, or prospectively by coordination teams and evaluators, and so that its fit can be tested against other cases (Darcy et al., 2013).

7. Discussion

7.1 Implications for theory and practice

The North East Nigeria case lends support to a historical institutional reading of humanitarian coordination. The decisive changes clustered around a critical juncture in mid 2016, when mortality alerts, famine analysis and agency emergency declarations loosened prior constraints and created space for rapid institutional innovation (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). Arrangements introduced at that juncture, including the move of the response's centre to Borno, the government's emergency coordination centre and the pooled fund, persisted and structured what followed. At the same time, earlier features, notably government co-leadership of sectors and the centrality of Abuja-level forums, were not displaced but layered beneath the new structures (Pierson, 2000). The resulting hybrid was more capable but also more complex, raising the costs of participation for smaller and national actors.

The case also qualifies the literature on cluster coordination. Much of that literature presumes a formally activated cluster system that should eventually transition to national leadership (Steets et al., 2010; IASC, 2015). In Nigeria the sequence was different: a nationally co-led sector system existed first, and international capacity was layered onto it during the scale-up without a formal system-wide activation. This sequence avoided some of the ownership problems associated with clusters but did not prevent the international dominance of decision-making and funding that the localisation literature criticises (Ramalingam et al., 2013; Wall & Hedlund, 2016). The implication is that co-leadership structures alone do not secure national influence; influence follows money, information and presence near operations.

For practice, three implications follow. First, coordination teams should specify co-leadership by function and level of government rather than relying on generic co-chair arrangements, particularly in federal systems where state governments control access and services (Harvey, 2009). Second, investment in state and local capacity should be planned as part of the scale-up, not deferred to recovery, because the record shows that recovery funding remained the weakest link (OCHA, 2018b). Third, advocacy functions need protected space within the coordination system, since the most consequential alerts in 2016 came from outside it (Roberts, 2017).

7.2 Limitations

The study's reliance on published documents introduces systematic biases. International agencies and donors produce most of the corpus, and the perspectives of national NGOs, state officials and affected communities are therefore mediated through reports written by others (Brown & Donini, 2014). Internal minutes of the Humanitarian Country Team, sector meetings and government task forces are not public, so the analysis infers decision processes from reported outcomes. Some institutional documents lack explicit publication dates, and in such cases the study relied on dates recorded by reputable repositories, which introduces a small margin of uncertainty.

The year gate is a further constraint, and Section 3.3 sets out which conclusions are exposed to it. Judgements on the effectiveness of returns policies and the durability of the multi-year strategy are the most provisional, because the documents that would test them lay beyond the gate (OCHA, 2019). The state-level comparison is necessarily partial because the published record concentrates on Borno. Coding by a single analyst carries a risk of interpretive drift that the separate verification pass reduces for figures and dates but cannot remove for qualitative judgements. Finally, the study cannot verify the accuracy of reported figures beyond cross-checking among sources, and several figures, notably those concerning populations in inaccessible areas, were contested even at the time (Brechenmacher, 2019). These limitations argue for treating the findings as well-grounded propositions rather than settled conclusions.

7.3 Validating the checklist

The next step for the checklist is validation against evidence that the published record cannot supply. Structured interviews with government co-leads, sector coordinators, national NGO representatives and members of state-level forums, coded against the six dimensions and set against the documentary findings reported here, would test whether the indicators capture how

decision rights were actually exercised, including the informal relationships and trust that documents leave out (Moshtari & Gonçalves, 2017). This is the stage at which the instrument is either confirmed or revised, not an optional extension. A second validation step is application to further cases: other protracted crises in federal or decentralised states, such as those elsewhere in the Lake Chad Basin, would show whether the six dimensions travel or are specific to the Nigerian settlement (United Nations Security Council, 2017). A third is a state-level comparison of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe drawing on sector bulletins and state government records, which would test whether the subnational capacity dimension discriminates between better and worse performing forums. Validation of this kind should invite factual review by the relevant institutions while preserving analytical independence, and should involve national researchers and affected communities in setting the questions (Barbelet, 2018).

8. Conclusion

Between 2014 and 2018 North East Nigeria moved from a nationally managed displacement emergency with a thin international presence to a large, layered and increasingly institutionalised humanitarian response. This article has reconstructed that transition phase by phase and shown that the decisive changes followed a critical juncture in mid 2016, when evidence of extreme need was translated into public alarm, emergency declarations and new government and international coordination structures. Coordination capacity expanded substantially, and resource mobilisation, planning and displacement data became genuine strengths. Growth in structures, however, did not automatically produce common priorities or equal influence. Government institutions provided mandate, access and continuity; international actors provided surge capacity, finance and standards; national organisations and affected communities remained formally included but weakly empowered. The Negotiated Coordination Settlement Framework, offered as a diagnostic checklist derived from this case and ready for testing in others, organises these findings into six dimensions with observable indicators: explicit co-leadership, subnational capacity, inclusive participation, shared data standards, field-informed decision-making and transition preparedness. Durable coordination in protracted conflict is achieved by negotiating, recording and periodically renewing the settlement among those who hold authority, resources, knowledge and legitimacy.

Responses that invest early in that settlement, and in the state and local capacity that sustains it, are best placed to move from acute relief towards recovery.

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