

Inter-Cluster Diagnostic Mission to Pakistan

Islamabad and Peshawar, Pakistan

July 13-17, 2009

MISSION COMPOSITION

The Inter-Cluster Diagnostic Mission was composed of team members representing the Global Cluster Leads and included Cluster representatives from Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), Health, Nutrition, Education, Early Recovery, Agriculture, Protection, Emergency Shelter, Camp Coordination & Camp Management (CCCM), NGO consortia (InterAction & ICVA), and the Humanitarian Coordination Support Section of OCHA.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Cluster Approach was adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 2005 as a coordination mechanism to address the long recognized gaps in humanitarian response and to strengthen the predictability and accountability of international aid efforts.

It is envisioned that the Cluster Approach would ensure that 1) roles and responsibilities among humanitarian partners operate in an inclusive, consultative, and transparent manner, 2) leadership and responsibilities are established at the sector level, 3) all relevant sectors and cross-cutting issues are covered, and 4) accountability of humanitarian partners and their interventions will improve.

In April 2009, a military operation launched by the Pakistan armed forces against militants in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) resulted in a massive exodus of citizens seeking refuge. This produced one of the largest and fastest growing human displacements in over a decade.

In response to this extraordinary crisis, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) decided to upgrade and strengthen the Cluster Approach to ensure a coordinated humanitarian response. Although the Cluster Approach is not new to Pakistan, the scale of this emergency placed enormous challenges on newly established structures.

At the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), this Inter-Cluster Diagnostic Mission was deployed. The mission conducted extensive key informant interviews as well as direct observation of Cluster meetings and coordination gatherings in both Islamabad and Peshawar. Individual face-to-face interviews and semi-structured small group meetings were arranged with the Resident Coordinator (RC), HC, Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), Pakistan Government officials, national and international NGOs, UN specialized agencies, GenCap advisor, and major donors.

The observations and recommendations of this report are organized along the themes that were consistently identified during this mission. These themes are, 1) Coordination, 2) Funding, 3) Cluster Leadership and Partnership, and 4) Strategy Development and Prioritization.

Annexed to this report are detailed descriptions of individual Cluster improvement plans relevant to WASH, Health, Nutrition, Education, Early Recovery, Agriculture, Protection, CCCM, and Emergency Shelter Clusters.

A proposed follow-up Cluster Support Mission has been recommended for deployment around August or September 2009. Terms of Reference (ToR) for this mission are also annexed to this report.

HIGHLIGHTS

The humanitarian community in Pakistan has been confronted with an unprecedented displacement emergency both in terms of the speed in which it developed and the number of civilians that are affected. This complex crisis has been characterized by rapidly changing circumstances such as frequent military operations, extensive geographically affected areas, inadequate and delayed funding, premature and coerced return of displaced populations, onset of heavy rains, and a highly insecure operational environment.

In spite of the extraordinary challenges that humanitarian stakeholders are facing, there is a readiness to improve the effectiveness of emergency assistance. Some progress has been already made on improving coordination among the relief community.

Crucial challenges and lingering structural problems still remain however. For example, the division of responsibilities between Islamabad-based coordination and Peshawar-based activities is a shifting and dynamic problem. Following two deadly attacks and the murder of UN personnel, some of the Peshawar-based Cluster meetings were temporarily forced to relocate to Islamabad. This is perceived as a dilemma for Provincial authorities and a staffing conflict for international and national NGOs. The intensive face-to-face assemblies that the Cluster Approach requires places a heavy meeting burden on national and international NGOs. Their staffing patterns are often lean in capital cities with the concentration of personnel located in field sites.

Unlike the natural disasters that the humanitarian community in Pakistan has faced in the recent past, this conflict-induced crisis represents a significant departure from the past. The unique characteristics of displacement resulting from armed conflict demands flexible working modalities as well as adaptable and politically sensitive interventions. In addition, Pakistan's security forces have stepped up their visibility at coordination and decision making fora. This has raised ethical concerns regarding the independence and impartiality of the overall aid effort since the military remains a party to the conflict.

With each new emergency in Pakistan, the government has established different administrative structures and operational authorities. The proliferation of official bodies at different stages of the crisis has resulted in shifting and fragmented government interlocutors with whom to coordinate. An ongoing challenge remains in terms of how to address the needs of newly displacements and repeatedly uprooted populations as well as determining the most appropriate government mechanism with which to coordinate. In order to ensure contact with the appropriate governmental agency, it will be important to undertake a mapping of the burgeoning Federal and Provincial agencies.

Considering that Pakistan is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, efforts to improve the effectiveness of the Cluster Approach will likely pay dividends for many years. Institutionalizing the Cluster Approach at the national level will be important to avoid continuously reinventing the wheel with each new crisis.

The development of a cohesive and over-arching Inter-Cluster strategy is lacking, in part, due to insufficient contributions from some of the Clusters and uneven commitment from the HCT. Genuine attempts to move forward under fluctuating and unpredictable circumstances has been piecemeal and clumsy at times.

In order to advance a cohesive framework, there must be consistent and committed application by the Clusters of their specific Terms of Reference, adherence to designated roles and responsibilities, compliance with Cluster standards, and transparent prioritization of interventions.

Many criticisms repeated during this mission were directed at the strain placed on Cluster leads that faced conflicting demands as a result of “double-hatting”, i.e. simultaneous agency responsibilities while being responsible for the management of a Cluster.

It became obvious that each Cluster requires dedicated full-time Coordinators to meet the onerous workload of coordinating a Cluster. It has been suggested that this would also help reduce the interagency rivalries that inevitably arise in a situation of conflicting loyalties.

The increased expense of this improved coordination must be communicated to donors as the new “cost of doing business”. These expenses should be integrated into future funding appeals and fundraising initiatives.

A common complaint raised by Cluster participants was the high turnover of staff and the shortage of experienced group managers. A lack of competent meeting facilitation skills was occasionally evident by disorganized gatherings where the agendas and purposes of meetings were unclear. The routine administrative responsibilities of convening and hosting a meeting appeared to be an afterthought. Coordinators at various levels and leaders of task forces should be exposed to rudimentary meeting facilitation skills through orientation and capacity building training.

Cross-cutting issues, such as gender, human rights, HIV disease, disability and environmental impact, must be mainstreamed into the Clusters. They should be a key component of any capacity development and training initiatives that follow this mission.

Currently in Pakistan, gender issues have been located in a sub-Cluster under the Protection Cluster framework. In order to prevent the compartmentalization of gender concerns and avoid confining gender issues to just one Cluster, this gender sub-Cluster should be reorganized in the form of a Gender Task Force with Gender Technical Focal Points participating in all Clusters. Within the Protection Cluster, a Vulnerability Matrix has been elaborated. This matrix should be used as a basis for prioritizing not just gender, but all vulnerability issues, as a priority cross-cutting thematic.

Despite many constraints some Inter-Cluster work in key areas, such as the Conflict Early Recovery Immediate Needs Assessment (CERINA), has made progress. One imminent challenge however will be for the Cluster system to respond to a task order by the HCT to develop an operational strategy that addresses the needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living among communities as well as providing direct support to host families.

The fluidity of the displacement crisis, heightened security environment, and increasingly restricted movement has impaired the Cluster Approach from enacting clear and consistent policy level guidance at both the Islamabad and Peshawar level. A remedy that was repeatedly recommended during this mission was the creation and designation of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator that would be based in Peshawar. This would enable stronger strategic decision making closer to where the majority of programs are being implemented.

In order to further decentralize coordination, there must be a clear delineation between the operational coordination occurring at the Provincial and District level versus the strategic and policy support that should take place at the Federal level.

Since the center-of-gravity for operational activities are based in NWFP, a strengthened and enhanced OCHA presence in Peshawar, along with the designation of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, will reflect the concentration of humanitarian actors that exist at the Provincial level.

It was suggested that the dynamic and ever-changing situation, along with restricted movement and finite human resources, would benefit from innovative transaction and communication methods. By not relying exclusively on face-to-face encounters, the frequently observed “meeting fatigue” could be reduced.

Cluster and Inter-Cluster performance would immediately be improved by strengthening knowledge management mechanisms. Beyond the mere dissemination of information, the synthesis and analysis of data will greatly improve strategic decision making. The maintenance and updating of the OCHA-HABITAT information portal is necessary in order to ensure that it is regarded as a timely and accurate information source. Dedicated full-time IT support is required to maintain a fully operational and live interface.

The mission heard strident critiques of instances where project funding was disbursed through a Cluster mechanism. Complaints centered around perceived lack of transparency in decision making, delays in disbursement of funds, lack of objectivity in resource allocation, and the inevitable conflict-of-interest between Coordinators and their respective agency. Although the Cluster Approach is an appropriate means for resource mobilization, donor advocacy, and fundraising, direct financial disbursements through a Cluster contaminates the objective ethos of a coordinating body. Disbursement of funds should be done directly from donors to partners or through a common pooled funding mechanism.

An immediate delineation and segregation-of-duties between the disbursement of funds versus the identification and prioritization of funding was recommended as a “quick win” intervention to improve the effectiveness and the Clusters and the morale of its participants.

Representatives from the Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications Cluster were not part of this diagnostic mission nor did the team have a chance to solicit input from the World Food Program. Contributions from focal points on the cross cutting issues such as age, HIV disease, and environmental impact are also not included in this report due to the short time frame of the mission. Human rights concerns were raised as a concern by key informants during the mission but these issues are not sufficiently addressed in the recommendations below. These gaps in the overall analysis should be considered when planning the deployment of the follow-on Inter-Cluster Support Mission.

The Key Recommendations below are categorized according to themes that were consistently identified during this mission: Coordination, Funding, Cluster Leadership and Partnership, and Strategy Development and Prioritization. Additionally these recommendations include a timeframe within which the suggested revisions should be implemented, such as immediate “quick wins”, issues to be addressed in the coming weeks, and interventions that should be enacted by the end of 2009 (in time for the beginning of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan as outlined in the 2010 Consolidate Appeal).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

COORDINATION

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		Time Frame
Cluster Improvement Plans	The Inter-Cluster Diagnostic Mission will provide individual Cluster Improvement Plans. Once approved by the in-country Clusters, these plans should be monitored by the HCT to ensure implementation of recommendations.	Quick Win
	In order to permit strategic thinking and improved Cluster Coordinator leadership, the Cluster Lead Agencies, in close collaboration with their partners, should map out the capacities, roles, and responsibilities within individual Clusters. This should include specification of a list of required tasks, mapping out intra-Cluster capacities, and distributing tasks among the Cluster partners. The Clusters should monitor the execution of tasks by Cluster partners with the understanding that the respective partners are accountable to the Cluster for achieving the desired results. <i>(Note: elements of this recommendation will be outlined in the individual Cluster Improvement Plans)</i>	By end of Sept 2009
Cross-cutting issues	Gender should not be a sub-Cluster under the Protection Cluster but rather reformed as a Task Force under the leadership of GENCAP. This change will help mainstream gender activities into Cluster work at both the intra- and inter- Cluster levels. The task force will identify Gender focal points and ensure their participation in the Clusters.	Quick Win
	Clusters should take concrete steps to ensure mainstreaming of cross cutting issues including age, human rights, HIV Disease, disability and gender within all Clusters. Ensuring that human rights are understood and considered within Clusters and between Clusters should be a key component of the August-September 2009 Inter-Cluster Support Mission.	By end of Sept 2009
Sub-Clusters	Clusters should ensure that the functioning of sub-Clusters is integrated within the overall strategic view of the 'parent' Cluster.	By end of Sept 2009
	Clusters should work with sub-Clusters to ensure that all sub-Cluster issues and themes are fully and independently addressed, e.g. Maternal Child Health within the Health Cluster.	
Early Recovery	To mainstream Early Recovery (ER) and to minimize the number of meetings, ER capacities should be strengthened within the relevant Clusters. <i>(Note: this is a shift from the current approach where Clusters attend the ER Cluster)</i> (Please note that in Peshawar, the ER Coordination Meeting is currently the only forum where the provincial government and the humanitarian community discuss inter-cluster ER activities at the technical level that are of common concern and the provincial government must be consulted to identify the optimal coordination meeting mechanism).	Quick Win
	The issue of Returns and the ER processes are an opportunity to strengthen multi-Cluster Needs Assessments and to permit more holistic and coherent response through joint strategic inter-Cluster planning and coordination. Multi-Cluster assessments should be used in assessing the Returns process.	By end of 2009
Humanitarian Country Team	Clusters should be represented at the HCT by the Cluster Lead Agency. The CLA representatives should act as the representative of the Cluster while other agency representatives (such as the deputy) would speak on behalf of that agency. Given the challenges of dual representation of both the Cluster and the agency, it may be advisable to have additional members in the form of Cluster Coordinators and increased NGO representation in the HCT. <i>(Note: terminology is suggested below to ensure clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities regarding the Cluster approach)</i>	By end of 2009
Inter-Cluster Coordination	The HCT should develop and strengthen national level operational strategies and ensure that proposals are consistent while supporting and guiding Peshawar level operations.	By end of Sept 2009
	ICCM Peshawar should maintain a focus on inter-Cluster coordination while the HCT provides strategic direction. ICCM will need additional support to achieve this.	Quick win

Meeting	The Inter-Cluster mechanism in Peshawar needs should be further developed to reflect field realities and governmental structures. There are two existing mechanisms of coordination; 1) the CCCM Cluster, and 2) the ER Network. In order to address the needs of populations outside of formal camps, a more rationalized structured should be considered.	By end of August 2009
Humanitarian Architecture	Strengthen operations in Peshawar by designating a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator with a mandate to ensure operational coordination and leadership within an agreed upon operational strategy.	By end of 2009
	Strengthen and enhance OCHA's presence in Peshawar to ensure inter-Cluster coordination, improve humanitarian information management, and develop appropriate use of basic coordination tools. By strengthening operational decision making in Peshawar, the HCT and Inter-Cluster coordination mechanism will have the space for strategic thinking as well as policy and strategy development at the Islamabad level.	By end of Sept 2009
	Islamabad should focus on broader policy and strategic issues, advocacy, and resource mobilization. Analysis and strategy development should be undertaken by the Federal level to support Provincial level. It is important that the Federal level concentrates on national issues that are above and beyond Peshawar's operational remit.	
	ICCM in Peshawar should clearly delineate its area of responsibility (i.e. NWFP) and ensure operational decisions are in line with HCT strategy at the Islamabad level.	By end of 2009
	On-the-ground operational decision making, even beyond Peshawar, should be decentralized and localized to the greatest extent possible including the District level authorities. Humanitarian actors that are the most proximal to relief activities should be empowered to have some decision making authority.	
The government's emergency response structures are complicated and influx. These changes need to be understood and mapped so that Inter-Cluster Coordination mechanisms can be properly aligned with these nascent structures.		
Links to Development	The humanitarian community should draw on resources from the development community (e.g. DRM baselines, institutional capacity building, etc.) and promote operational synergies in order to avoid duplication, optimize the impact of relief, ensure consistency with ongoing programs, and ensure availability of baseline information.	By end of October 2009
Information Management	All Clusters should develop and maintain basic coordination tools including contact lists, WWW databases, and relevant maps as quickly as possible. Cluster Coordinators and participants should be trained to utilize and input into Financial Tracking Sheets.	By end of Sept 2009
	The updating and maintenance of the information portal must be improved. It is recommended that OCHA ensure a fully operational portal on a full-time basis and that the hrl is widely disseminated. CLAs and partners should contribute to ensuring that the portal is accurate, timely, and makes appropriate information available. The portal should have dedicated full-time IT support.	
	Sitreps, bulletins, and routine reporting should be Cluster focused as well as reflect partnerships and cross cutting issues.	

FUNDING

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	Time Frame
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Funding for Coordination	The costs of improved coordination must be communicated to donors as well as integrated into future humanitarian appeals. It is incumbent on the HCT to ensure there is adequate time for consultation and solicitation in the appeal processes so that a more product can be developed.	To be prepared for CAP 2010
Clusters	Cluster decisions regarding identification and prioritization of funding must be transparent, objective and clearly communicated. It is preferable that money does not pass through lead agencies as current fund disbursement mechanisms have proven to be slow in Pakistan. In addition, disbursement of project funding through CLA has exacerbated tensions among partners and presents an avoidable conflict-of-interest dilemma.	By end of Sept 2009
	In line with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship and the principles of Humanitarian Reform, funding should be allocated strictly on the basis of needs. The Cluster should be used to identify and prioritize needs. It is appropriate for donors to seek guidance from the Clusters for project priorities.	
	To avoid misperceptions about objectivity and to speed up the flow of funding, It is recommended that the Clusters and CLAs not function as disbursement mechanism. Clusters should be used to identify and prioritize projects, (an information sharing/ communication mechanism should be in place to ensure that local NGOs should not lose funding opportunities simply because they are not consistently present at cluster meetings) conduct strategic planning, mobilize resources, and advocate with donors. Disbursement of funds should be done directly from the donor to the partner or to a pooled funding instrument on the basis of recommendations made by the Clusters. Decision making criteria should be agreed upon, documented and shared with all Cluster members.	
Humanitarian Country Team	The HCT should actively identify opportunities for collaborative projects as well as joint programming with key partners within and across Clusters.	In time for 2010 CAP
	The strengthened HCT strategy should ensure that both time-critical issues (such as agriculture, early recovery, education) and life-saving priorities are reflected in resource mobilization recommendations.	By end of Sept 2009
Donor Coordination	The various reporting methods for resource mobilization and in-kind donations should be streamlined. This will improve FTS reporting from donors and Clusters in particular with bilateral humanitarian funding.	By end of 2009

CLUSTER LEADERSHIP and PARTNERSHIP

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		Time Frame
Humanitarian Architecture	Designate and deploy a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator to be based in Peshawar to ensure leadership, decision making, and quick responses to the rapidly changing field context.	By end of Sept 2009
	Strengthen HCT leadership of Clusters as well as providing vision and guidance on strategic concerns.	
	Terms of Reference for Clusters, Inter-Cluster Coordination Meetings, and the HCT should correctly reflect level of responsibilities and inter-connectedness.	
	Standards as listed in Generic Cluster Terms of Reference must be adhered to.	
	The designation of Cluster leadership should be based on the capabilities of a particular agency within the specific geographical area and agreed upon by the Cluster members.	
	To avoid “meeting fatigue” other transaction and communication methods should be employed in addition to face-to-face meetings.	Ongoing

Staffing	There should be full-time dedicated Cluster Leads for each Cluster to ensure effective functioning and to combat the conflict-of-interest that arises with “double-hatting”.	By end of October 2009
	CLAs should review their human resource capabilities in relation to the ongoing humanitarian response and prioritize additional staff as required.	
	Cluster Coordinators, sub-Cluster Coordinators, sub-national Cluster Coordinators, technical working group leaders, and task force leaders, should be oriented and trained in group management competencies such as meeting facilitation skills and team-building.	By end of Sept 2009
	High staff turnover must be reduced to ensure consistent Cluster leadership. International staff should work with and accompany national staff in order to reduce dependence on short-term international staff.	
Partnership	To ensure inclusive and equal participation of partners in Clusters coordination, additional non-UN personnel should be sought for co-leadership positions.	By end of 2009
	The Principles of Partnership (Equality, Transparency, Results-Oriented Approach, Complementarity, and Responsibility) should be the ethos of Cluster functioning.	Quick win
	Clusters must invest in, build leadership and develop the capacity of all partners. This includes government, CSO, national and international NGOs.	By end of 2009

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT and PRIORITIZATION

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		Time Frame
Strategic Discussion	Clusters should act as a forum for strategic issues as well as solving day-to-day technical and operational problems.	By end of Sept 2009
	Existing standards should be reaffirmed within the Cluster (e.g. SPHERE Minimum Standards) and integrated into the Cluster strategy.	
	To improve accountability, monitoring and reporting should be integrated into Cluster functioning. It must be made clear to all participants that monitoring is a joint responsibility of the Cluster partners and the CLA.	
	Small groups that are identified by the HCT could investigate more forward-looking topics and encourage ensure analysis to improve agenda-setting and clearer articulation of problems.	
Gap & Needs-Driven	The identification of project priorities must be objectively derived by the analysis of needs and service gaps rather than agency mandates or other non-objective criteria.	By end of 2009
	The Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan should be amended due to the evolving nature of the crisis. This will permit a re-prioritization and identification of evolving humanitarian needs and improved resource mobilization without a substantial overhaul or investment of time and resources.	By end of Sept 2009
Remote Program-ming	The GCL should investigate “Best Practices” and innovative methodologies from other crises and disseminate among Cluster participants.	Quick wins
	Identify the most appropriate local partners for implementation and participation in the overall coordination and service delivery forum. Develop capacities of local partners and identify focal points among the IDP communities.	By end of 2009

Civil-Military	With the pervasive presence of Pakistan security forces within the humanitarian effort, the principles of independence and impartiality must be asserted. The HCT should emphasize these principles in its interactions with the government’s Special Support Group. OCHA can take the lead in advocating on behalf of the humanitarian community and reinforcing collaboration with civilian governmental structures.	ongoing
Contingency Planning	The ongoing contingency planning and preparedness efforts should continue to be an integral part of cluster strategic planning to enable and support a coherent and anticipated response to emergencies.	ongoing

TERMINOLOGY

Cluster Lead: The Cluster Lead is an agency that formally commits to a leadership role within the international humanitarian community within a particular sector or area of activity. The Cluster Lead ensures appropriate and adequate humanitarian response as well as high standards of predictability, accountability, and partnership within the Cluster. The Cluster Lead commits to function as the “provider of last resort” in that particular sector or area of activity when necessary. *(from Operational Guidance on Designating Sector/Cluster Leads in Ongoing Emergencies, IASC Task Team on the Cluster Approach, Geneva, 23 May 2007)*

A Cluster Lead can also be an agency that is responsible for the Cluster at the field level. The Cluster Lead is therefore not necessarily a Global Cluster Lead. *(from Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Lead at Country Level).*

Global Cluster Lead: This is an agency that functions at the global level and is responsible for one or more of the eleven Clusters at the level of inter-agency and international level. *(from Guidance Note on using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response)*

Cluster Coordinator: The individual who functions as a focal point at the field level and facilitates the day-to-day running of a Cluster. The Cluster Coordinator is not necessarily from a GCL agency. *(from Terms of Reference for Cluster Coordinators)*

Global Cluster Coordinator: The individual who functions as a focal point at the global level for the day-to-day facilitation of the global Cluster *(from Generic Terms of Reference for Global Cluster Leads)*