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66TH WORKING GROUP MEETING

IASC Interim Self-Assessment of Implementation of the Cluster Approach in the Field

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Preface

During the IASC Working Group in July 2006, OCHA was requested “to lead a process to evaluate the cluster approach in the pilot countries.” Given that field implementation had been delayed for a number of reasons, including lack of guidance and funding, it was felt that an interim self-assessment, rather than an evaluation (internal or external) would be more appropriate at this point in time.

The Interim Self-Assessment is a progress report and is not intended to be a comprehensive evaluation of the cluster approach. Such an evaluation is expected to take place in late 2007. The Self-Assessment is intended to highlight main trends, themes and lessons from field experience, in order to inform IASC Working Group and Principals’ discussions about the implementation of the cluster approach in the coming year.

Three exercises, carried out between September and October 2006 and led by an IASC Core Learning Group, have contributed to this self-assessment:

- 1) Development of an Analytical Framework against which to assess efforts to implement the cluster approach at the field level. Recognizing that benchmarks for successful field implementation were not established prior to the roll-out of the cluster approach, the Analytical Framework was based on the overall aim and objectives of the approach, as outlined in the Preliminary IASC Guidance Note, issued in July 2006. Based on this, the primary issues of concern for the Self Assessment were the extent to which the cluster approach improved the effectiveness of overall humanitarian assistance through: greater predictable leadership and gap filling, strengthening partnerships, improving accountability to the Humanitarian Coordinator, and strengthening field-level coordination and prioritization.
- 2) Desk Review of more than 50 documents from various UN and non-UN IASC sources. The documents included various formal and informal observations and evaluations of agency efforts to implement the cluster approach at the field level in both the four IASC-selected “roll out” countries (DRC, Liberia, Somalia and Uganda) and in “new” emergencies (e.g. Pakistan, Indonesia and Lebanon).
- 3) Four in-country self-assessments and workshops that took place in the “roll out” countries.

The below document summarizes the main issues emerging from these three exercises. The complete set of documentation (Analytical Framework, Desk Review and country reports) has been shared with the IASC Core Learning Group.

The Self -Assessment was time-limited and took into account the views of individuals and organizations that either submitted documentation for the Desk Review, attended workshops, engaged in interviews, or responded to questionnaires. Insight from this base of respondents may not, therefore, encapsulate all views or issues related to the cluster approach. The Self-Assessment was also consciously focused on gathering input from field practitioners, but given limited time, not all stakeholders were necessarily able to contribute to the process.

Although some efforts have been made to incorporate the views of Global Cluster Leads, an acknowledged gap in the Self-Assessment is the inadequate analysis of the role that Global Cluster Leads may have played in supporting field implementation. As agreed by the IASC WG in July 2006, a Report on Implementation of Global-Level Cluster Capacity-Building (i.e. a report on the goals and objectives for each cluster as outlined in the revised 2006 cluster appeal) will take place in early 2007, prior to the development of a 2007 Global Cluster Appeal.

The documents covered in the Desk Review each reflect on a point in time in a fast evolving process of roll out. Therefore, conclusions or lessons identified may have been surpassed by events or may have been incorporated into subsequent response or by subsequent clarification of policy guidance. The potential time lag of the Desk Review material is balanced, to some extent, by the validation against findings from the four field workshops.

Despite the above constraints in the Self-Assessment methodology and time frame it is noteworthy that there was a remarkable consistency of issues raised during the in-country workshops and in the documents submitted for the Desk Review. There appears to be more or less consensus among field and headquarters-based practitioners on the core strengths and weaknesses of agencies' efforts to implement the cluster approach. As such, the lessons identified in the Self-Assessment point to a clearer direction for future implementation of the approach.

Cluster lead agencies, other organizations, and country teams that provided inputs—many of which were helpfully self-reflective and critical—should be particularly thanked for approaching the Interim Self-Assessment in the spirit of learning and transparency, which was its original intent.

General Observations

1. The overall perception among humanitarian partners is that the cluster approach has demonstrated potential to improve the overall effectiveness of humanitarian response. Field teams, especially in DRC, Somalia, Liberia and Lebanon credit the approach with helping to focus more attention on long-standing “gaps” and creating a more predictable response trigger for these areas, which in some cases meant deployment of increased capacity to address unmet needs. Especially in new emergencies, roles and responsibilities for “leading” different aspects of the response can be considered more predictable today than one year ago. The cluster approach has also helped to foster an atmosphere for critical reflection and debate at both the headquarters and field level on the coordination structures and mind-sets needed to facilitate improved partnerships with authorities (where appropriate) and between UN and non-UN partners.
2. However, many challenges remain and are fairly consistent across each of the

situations. These include (a) cluster leads interpret their role differently, making it difficult for partners to know what to reasonably expect, and *vice versa*; (b) internal management of clusters varies greatly depending on the skills of the individual leading; (c) “participation” in clusters has come to mean attending (often poorly managed) meetings; (d) some perceive that the clusters mainly serve the programme and financial interests of cluster leads and that cluster leads are not always “honest brokers.”

3. Additionally, there has been inconsistency in the way field teams have applied the cluster approach, with some (e.g. Pakistan, Somalia and DRC) regarding it as an approach to strengthen leadership, coherence and sectoral coordination in all major areas of humanitarian activity and others (e.g. Uganda) regarding clusters and sectors as distinct bodies, which led to the development of a “two tiered” coordination structures. The fact that the IASC has emphasized that clusters are primarily to fill “gaps” has been interpreted by some as suggesting that “clusters” are fundamentally different “sectors,” and has contributed to the confusion of field colleagues.
4. Some NGOs at the global level have expressed concern that the perceived distinction between clusters and sectors has inadvertently increased the visibility of “new” clusters, while “sectors”, such as education, continue to be less visible and, consequently, receive less donor support. This argument is debatable, as it is far from certain if there is a correlation between being called a “cluster” and receiving donor funds. Yet, these NGO concerns highlight the different perceptions of the cluster approach among stakeholders, which have been exacerbated by a lack of clear guidance.
5. There have been some differences between the application of the cluster approach in new and ongoing emergencies. In new emergencies, the cluster approach was more readily accepted as a way in which to organize a coordinated response, primarily because the new approach was not competing with existing humanitarian coordination frameworks. In ongoing emergencies (e.g. the IASC “roll out” countries), this was not necessarily the case. The cluster approach was in some cases (particularly Liberia and Uganda) perceived as “imposed” by headquarters. In ongoing emergencies, there has been more difficulty in rationalizing the cluster approach with existing structures, which has caused, in some cases, duplication of coordination mechanisms, frustration with excess meetings, and further resistance to application of the approach.
6. The inability of the IASC to agree on clear guidance for the “cluster approach” and to disseminate this to the field at the beginning of the process led to considerable confusion at the field level and did not inspire confidence in the new approach. The Self-Assessment confirms that confusion persists in some cases and remains an obstacle to implementation.
7. Based on an analysis of the issues consistently raised by field colleagues, and the current draft of the IASC’s Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach (which benefited greatly from field inputs), it appears that some of the common concerns raised during the Self Assessment, such as the confusion over the difference between clusters and sectors, and the accountability of sector leads, may be addressed once the Guidance Note is disseminated.
8. Documents submitted for the Desk Review, and the field workshops strongly recommended that sector leads receive training to fulfill their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in the generic Terms of Reference (which was first disseminated during the Pakistan earthquake and has since been revised). In particular, recommendations called for training on skills such as: meeting management, facilitation, consensus building, and other cross-cutting skills necessary to carry out the ToR. Following discussions with Cluster Leads in July 2006, OCHA hired a consultant in October 2006 to identify the main generic training requirements of sector leads, in close collaboration with IASC

partners, and to design appropriate training tools to complement cluster-specific training.

9. Some field teams (Liberia, Uganda and Somalia) and interviews with several individuals working on global cluster lead issues found that the relationship between global cluster leads and field level clusters is still being worked out. Field colleagues were unclear on the support and services they could reasonably expect from global cluster leads. At the global level, clusters have interpreted their roles somewhat differently (often depending on whether they are dealing with a specific technical issue, such as health, or a cross-cutting issues, such as early recovery), and have made varying degrees of progress, making it difficult to provide “predictable support” to the field. In some cases at the field level, “clusters” were created for areas of humanitarian activity for which there is no corresponding “lead” at the headquarters level. In other cases, field-based leads differed from global leads. In such cases, it was doubly unclear—from both the perspective of the field and global cluster leads—how to provide support.
10. The Self-Assessment reconfirmed the interdependence of the four main prongs of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda: ensuring predictability and greater accountability of humanitarian response; strengthening humanitarian leadership and coordination; strengthening partnerships; and improving the predictability and timeliness of humanitarian financing. It is apparent from the Self-Assessment that strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator system and working with donors to manage the competition that arises from unpredictable funding both have a direct bearing on the success of the cluster approach.
11. The Self Assessment found that the process of “benchmarking,” which was identified in the Humanitarian Response Review as a major factor for improving overall humanitarian response and was expected by some to be included more rigorously in the humanitarian reform process, is an issue that requires further elaboration. This issue is explored below under the section on *Accountability*.

Predictable leadership and gap filling

12. There is not yet sufficient information and comparative analysis to determine the extent to which the cluster approach has contributed to more effective humanitarian response in countries where it is being used. However, the cluster approach appears to have made a predictable response more likely, by automatically triggering a designated group of organizations to “lead” response in key emergency sectors. For example, by the time of the Lebanon emergency, it was reasonably clear which organizations would be responsible for mobilizing different aspects of the response, such as Logistics, Protection and Water and Sanitation, which have been considered as “long-standing gap areas.” This example stands in stark contrast to previous emergencies, such as Darfur, in which lack of agency mandate and responsibility for gap areas led to lengthy discussions, delays in response, and *ad hoc* solutions. Although there are clearly important issues to be resolved – related to the consistency of cluster set-up and performance, the lack of a common understanding of “leadership,” and internal management of clusters – the achievement of greater predictability in countries using the cluster approach is clearly a positive step forward.
13. According to some individuals working with global cluster leads, major questions remain regarding the extent to which agencies have been able to ensure that their cluster lead responsibilities and commitments are reconciled with their organization’s systems. While agency Principals have agreed to the cluster approach, there is still a need to ensure adequate interpretation of what these commitments mean for the organization, as a whole, and to make the necessary institutional changes. While it is acknowledged that these changes will require considerable time and effort, some individuals working within

the global clusters feel that much of the responsibility for institutional change is left to them. The fact that there will only be one more cluster appeal (2007) gives greater urgency to the need for senior management within agencies leading clusters to look for means to mainstream their cluster responsibilities.

14. Based on analysis in the Desk Review and field workshops, it appears that some gaps previously identified by country teams and IDD/inter-agency/donor missions in the “roll out” countries are beginning to be addressed. Some cluster lead agencies have expanded their presence to both provide greater sector coordination and increase programming:

- In the case of Water and Sanitation in the DRC it is clear that there is now much greater capacity amongst humanitarian actors working in this sector. Investment in this sector has grown exponentially, from US\$ 1 million in 2005 to US\$ 13 million in 2006. For 2007, the draft Humanitarian Action Plan includes US\$ 99 million for water and sanitation projects, representing about 15% of the total appeal. At least in terms of resources, water and sanitation is no longer the “gap” area that it was in DRC one year ago.
- In the case of Protection, in Uganda, UNHCR has begun expanding its presence in the north, as have sub-cluster leads, UNICEF and OHCHR. In the DRC a number of new protection officers have been deployed, leading to better monitoring, advocacy and follow-up, and there are several instances in recent months when MONUC troops have been deployed to help protect civilians as a direct result of the advocacy efforts by the Protection cluster. In Somalia, the application of the cluster approach has finally put protection “on the agenda,” though gaps have not yet been comprehensively addressed.
- In the case of early recovery, implementation has been mixed, with a great deal of uncertainty as to how best to ensure effective early recovery planning and implementation across all areas of activity. In some instances (Uganda and DRC), an early recovery cluster has been established and has helped to bring more attention to return and reintegration issues, though concerns remain regarding the synergies between the early recovery cluster and other clusters. In Liberia, it was unclear how the early recovery cluster was to complement other early recovery initiatives and how best to implement the cluster approach at all in a mainly “transitional” context. In Somalia, following initial confusion and concerns about excessive meetings, efforts are being made to ensure that early recovery issues are integrated into all sector work, e.g. the health sector meeting now includes an agenda item on early recovery and an agenda item on humanitarian issues, but both are addressed within the same forum.

Again, while there are clearly still issues related to the level of participation and effectiveness of these initiatives, there are more systematic attempts to meet needs in previously considered “gap” areas.

15. Documents submitted for the Desk Review and field workshops identified the establishment of well-functioning information management (IM) systems as critical to improving humanitarian response in terms of identifying and filling gaps, supporting strategic planning and prioritization and reporting. The field identified IM gaps both within, and across, sectors. As pointed out in Liberia and Uganda, filling gaps demands knowledge of who is doing what, where (3Ws), as well as disaggregated data on needs. As noted from the Liberia experience, it is important to ensure that in contexts where there is an integrated UN mission, that appropriate and effective coordination and information management systems are established to support and facilitate humanitarian action, and that due consideration be given to the specific role that OCHA and HIC plays

in this regard. In DRC, the establishment of a web-based humanitarian information exchange platform is viewed as a useful tool for disseminating information on the cluster approach.

16. Field staff were largely unaware of efforts within the recently established IASC Information Management Working Group to ensure a more rigorous and consistent approach to IM in the field. An action plan, agreed by the IASC Working Group, includes clarifying the roles of OCHA and sector leads in IM, and taking stock of existing IM tools and how they could support better sector coordination. The group will also look at how Humanitarian Information Centers (HIC)—a common service—should be enhanced. These efforts should make full use of the lessons identified by field staff.
17. In terms of “leadership,” the long delay in providing cluster roll-out countries with specific guidance on the cluster approach, with detailed Terms of Reference for cluster leads, meant that there was a lack of shared understanding of this role, both among the institutions and individuals leading and participating in the clusters. In the absence of guidance on cluster leadership, cluster leads improvised as best they could. Sometimes, however, this improvisation contributed to the perception by non-UN partners that the cluster approach was too “UN centric.” Several field teams validated findings in the Desk Review that the separation of cluster lead and programme functions is often unclear, and can exacerbate the perception that agencies are pursuing their own programme priorities, especially when the cluster lead is also involved in funding decisions (e.g. pooled funding or CERF, as in DRC). In Uganda, some clusters are perceived as “a lead agency and their implementing partners,” which is contrary to the spirit of partnership as construed in the humanitarian reform agenda (see *Partnership* section below).
18. To address some of these issues, some field teams, such as Somalia and DRC, have appointed NGOs as “cluster co-chairs.” Some global cluster leads, such as WASH, have recognized the need for dedicated sector leads (especially in new emergencies) and have deployed staff accordingly, e.g. in Lebanon. Following the Lebanon crisis, an internal evaluation of UNHCR’s performance called for the appointment of leaders “with the necessary seniority and interpersonal skills to conduct meetings effectively and make them into a forum for prioritization and decision-making,” and further noted the need for cluster leaders to “place the interests of cluster members and the UN as a whole above the interests of their respective agency.” In order to establish a common approach to predictable sector leadership, all field teams recommended training for sector leads on their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in their ToR.

Partnership

19. While efforts to implement the cluster approach have helped strengthen partnerships between UN and non-UN organizations in some places and have created a greater “spirit” of collaboration, the general feeling is that there has not yet been sufficient tangible progress in this area. That said, tensions arising from efforts to implement the cluster approach have been a catalyst for frank, senior-level dialog at the headquarters level on the obstacles that make closer collaboration more difficult (see *Chairs’ Summary, Enhancing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action: A Dialogue Between UN and Non-UN Humanitarian Organizations*, 12-13 July 2006). As a result, a Global Humanitarian Platform has been established to agree on concrete measures to strengthen collaboration.
20. Field colleagues validated the Desk Review by noting that discussions about the cluster approach raised expectations about partnership, but provided few feasible and practical recommendations for realizing this. Most field teams in both new and ongoing emergencies noted the need to include *national* NGOs in a meaningful way into strategic

discussions. However, from the perspective of some cluster leads and OCHA staff, the issue of how to feasibly facilitate strategic discussions with dozens or hundreds of different stakeholders remains a real dilemma. Broadly speaking, field level coordination structures to facilitate partnership either do not yet exist or are inadequate. The Global Humanitarian Platform has recognized this as a key concern, and aims to develop concrete proposals for establishing inclusive Humanitarian Community Partnership Teams at the field level.

21. A related issue is the extent to which individual NGOs can or even should represent a “homogenous” or “unified” “NGO perspective.” Given the myriad of international and national NGOs in a given emergency (not to mention UN agencies), how do cluster leads and coordinators feasibly accommodate the myriad of interests? An early ICVA review of the roll out of the cluster approach in the DRC (March 2006) highlights the dilemma of ensuring appropriate NGO representation in existing coordination structures:

“The selection process of the NGOs and the responsibilities around that NGO participation were unclear; no terms of reference were developed explaining what participation entailed. There was no clear discussion about who (if anyone) the NGOs represented. The “responsibilities” of the NGOs ... were also not clearly discussed or agreed. As such, there was no mechanism to feed in the views of other NGOs ... nor was there a mechanism to report back to other NGOs on what took place.... From the perspective of NGOs that participate ... as well as from the perspective of those NGOs that do not, the NGOs attending the [meetings] do not represent anyone except themselves: they participate in the meetings in their own right.”

22. In line with the above, some cluster leads at both the field and global level called for greater clarity on the role of organizations participating in clusters. Given that cluster leads are “accountable” for ensuring an adequate humanitarian response and providing services and support as outlined in their ToR, and that success of clusters relies on effective partnership with others, some cluster leads felt it was both pragmatic and fair to expect some level of predictable commitment from participants.
23. Field teams in Uganda and Somalia noted that INGOs are often unaware of the extent to which their headquarters, or NGO consortia to which they belong, are involved in discussions and decisions regarding the humanitarian reform agenda. For example, a number of INGOs (e.g. ACF, Danish Refugee Council, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, World Vision) have developed position papers on the cluster approach and have contributed significantly to the development of the IASC Guidance Note. Field colleagues suggested that these views should “trickle down to the field level to ensure that positions are organizational, rather than individual.”
24. Much of the discussion on partnership has focused on the relationship between the UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations. However, issues of visibility and competition for funding, not to mention issues related to different programme priorities within the same sector, can be as much an obstacle to closer collaboration between UN agencies as they are between UN and non-UN organizations, and do not necessarily ensure that that “the whole humanitarian response equals more than the sum of its parts.”
25. Many field teams cited competition for visibility and limited donor funding as an impediment to partnership. There are differing views on the extent to which cluster leads should be involved in humanitarian financing decisions, be they related to the CERF, pooled funding, Flash Appeals or the CAP.
26. Some argue that clusters should be a mechanism through which project activities are (peer) reviewed before being submitted to donors. This argument is based on a view that only donors can effectively shape an incentive system to reward collaboration (see Desk

Review, Olsen and Hystad). Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) provides a sound foundation for donors to make funding decisions based on a shared analysis of needs and priorities, and for rewarding collaboration. Some have advocated that sector leads should be more aware of and use GHD Principles in order to strengthen advocacy to donors, and encourage their accountability to their GHD commitments. Others have pointed out that the guidance issued for Flash Appeals and Consolidated Appeal Process have, for a number of years, called on sector groups to jointly assess needs, prioritize activities, and review projects according to agreed criteria. Thus, the cluster approach simply improves on the long-standing practice of sector groups to play a role in humanitarian financing decisions.

27. Others are concerned that the focus on “leads” may prejudice donors to fund cluster lead agencies at the expense of other partners. The perception that donors have sometimes used clusters as a filter for selecting partners causes further suspicion and undermines partnership. Various pooled funding initiatives (which are not always viewed as transparent) and the CERF—which the General Assembly has agreed cannot be disbursed directly to NGOs—have done little to allay this perception. Many NGOs and non-cluster lead UN agencies are deeply skeptical that that cluster leads can remain “honest brokers” if they have undue influence on funding decisions.
28. Another issue is a perception among some that participation in clusters implies funding, and if funding is not forthcoming, there is little incentive to collaborate. At the same time, some NGOs are concerned about being too closely affiliated with “UN” funding mechanisms. In Somalia, there is a growing perception that “partnership seems to be funding related,” and in DRC it was felt that efforts should be made to emphasize that the Pooled Fund should be used to support the clusters and not the other way around. Some cluster leads have interpreted their relationship to “partners” as contractual (Somalia and Uganda), which undermines the spirit of the humanitarian reform. In Lebanon, UNHCR noted that in some cases “agencies ceased to attend cluster meetings once they had obtained funding for their activities.”
29. If cluster leads, together with partners, were to play a larger role in humanitarian financing decisions, leads would need to be perceived as “honest brokers,” independent of their agency affiliations, and would need to lead a transparent process by which funding proposals are reviewed in consultation with partners, based on evidence and clear criteria. Donors, for their part, would need to live up to GHD principles by rewarding collaboration. In truth, however, competition has been, and will likely remain, a reality in the aid business. It may be necessary to agree on practical, operational tools to manage the stated desire for more effective and coherent humanitarian response with the reality of funding competition.
30. Another area related to “partnerships” is the role of governments. The lack of specific IASC mention of this matter in the earliest phases of the roll-out has caused some (including UN member states) to conclude that the UN has positioned itself above governments as the “lead” in humanitarian emergencies. In some respects, this issue appears to have become overblown more by what was *not* explicitly said, than what was said. The current version of the IASC guidance note related to clusters corrects this omission, stating the clear responsibility of the government, where appropriate, for leading humanitarian response, and the role of cluster leads to ensure cooperation among international actors, appropriate linkages with government and local authorities, and capacity building.
31. That said, as with NGOs, efforts to implement the cluster approach have heightened recognition that national authorities are often overlooked as viable partners in humanitarian action. This has spurred discussion among humanitarian organizations on how best to include authorities in humanitarian coordination and decision-making

mechanisms at the field. In Somalia, as elsewhere, it is acknowledged that meaningful consultation with authorities and affected communities is almost non-existent. In Liberia, three of the seven clusters have yet to identify government counterparts at the national level. Though few practical recommendations emerged from this Self Assessment, the issue of how best to involve national authorities in humanitarian action is a matter that still requires work.

Accountability

32. "Accountability" is a key principle of the humanitarian reform generally, and has a specific meaning within the cluster approach. However, the revised draft IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach provides greater clarification on the accountability of cluster leads to Humanitarian Coordinators, and outlines the scope and limitations of the concept of "provider of last resort." The draft generic Terms of Reference for Sector Leads at the Country Level, which provides a detailed list of activities for which Cluster Leads are accountable, has not yet been widely disseminated and used in the roll-out countries. As a result, little progress has been made to ensure systematic accountability of cluster leads to HCs.
33. There was initially much concern that the cluster approach demanded accountability of non-UN actors to the UN. It took some time to explain to all humanitarian partners that this is not the case. Some field colleagues, having not been involved in these discussions and having not received adequate guidance from the IASC, still perceive that the cluster approach demands NGO accountability to the HC or the UN (Somalia, Uganda). The revised Guidance Note reflects a clearer understanding of "mutual" accountability between UN and non-UN agencies in implementing the cluster approach, stating ultimately that, "Individual humanitarian organizations can only be held accountable to sector leads in cases where they have made specific commitments to this effect." In line with this, field staff in Uganda and Somalia have emphasized the need for mutual accountability that is earned through trust and relationship building, and is not imposed.
34. Apart from the question of accountability of Cluster Leads to the HC, there is concern among field staff that more needs to be done to ensure greater accountability to recipients of assistance and that this has not been adequately addressed within the cluster approach, to date.
35. In many respects, the issue of ensuring greater accountability to recipients of aid is tied to improving a collective approach to needs assessment and analysis, establishing agreed objectives, identifying benchmarks and indicators of success, and effective monitoring of programme implementation and impact. These are long-standing concerns of the humanitarian community, and improvements have been attempted through such efforts as Good Humanitarian Donorship, the Sphere Project, CAP and CHAP reform, and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International, to name a few. Based on field inputs to this Self Assessment, it is not yet evident that these efforts and tools are being harnessed consistently to advance the aim of greater accountability to aid recipients.
36. Field staff also raised the issue of benchmarking the "roll out" of the cluster approach. At its inception, field teams began implementing the approach without guidance on what was meant to be achieved, and how this would be measured. In preparation for any future implementation of the cluster approach and the evaluation that is meant to take place at the end of 2007, it will be immediately necessary to define benchmarks for successful implementation, which should include reference to both process indicators (e.g. rationalizing coordination structures, identifying leads for all areas of humanitarian

response, ensuring partnership) and impact indicators (e.g. to measure the impact of the cluster's work on affected populations).

Strategic coordination and prioritization

37. As mentioned above, improving strategic field-level coordination and prioritization has been the subject of previous efforts to strengthen humanitarian response. The current humanitarian reform, including the cluster approach, has perhaps not been articulated strongly enough as a continuation of previous efforts, and the result is that processes and tools that have been established previously have not always been sufficiently linked to, or utilized in complementing, the approach.
38. There are some examples in which field teams have used existing tools to strengthen coordination, planning and prioritization. In the DRC, there have been some improvements to the "Action Plan," which includes improved (for 2007) benchmarks and indicators, as a result of a more systematic approach to collaboration in clusters. In Uganda, the Needs Analysis Framework (NAF) was used by the Food Security sector group as an evidence-based foundation for the CHAP. In Liberia, sector leads have committed to identifying benchmarks for each sector, which will be reported to the IASC CT so they can monitor progress.
39. Field staff identified several factors that seem to work against greater strategic coordination and prioritization, namely poor or inconsistent sector leadership (mentioned above), the unclear role of cluster participants and their "responsibility" to the wider group (mentioned above), poor or non-existent IM systems (mentioned above), overlapping or inappropriate coordination structures at both the capital and regional/district level, and confusion over the difference between "sectors" and "clusters," which has led in some cases to the creation of two-tiered field coordination mechanisms.
40. A lessons learned report produced by the Emergency Shelter Cluster following the Pakistan earthquake notes that, despite having issued standardized planning tools, most humanitarian organizations reverted to their own assessment and planning tools and standards during the emergency, making it difficult to organize around a common approach and work towards agreed objectives. A Red R/IOM review of the shelter cluster in Pakistan notes "confusion" among stakeholders on the status and expected role of standards and guidelines for cluster participants in terms of "adherence to them, dissemination of them and resolution of any differences." In Uganda, field colleagues noted that some cluster work plans appear to be individual agency plans "knitted together."
41. The role of global clusters in developing common tools that can be used by the field is an area where there have been different levels of progress. Some global clusters have been able to provide tools to the field, but there remains a disconnect between the understanding of the relationship between global and field level clusters. Global cluster leads can only "offer" services to the field and not impose anything on them. At the same time, there may be a need to better understand the requirements of field clusters so that global clusters can better service them.
42. The Self-Assessment found that in some cases, coordination structures themselves worked against effective coordination and prioritization, as well as integration of cross-cutting issues such as gender and HIV/AIDs. Field colleagues often looked to the Humanitarian Coordinator, with OCHA support, to ensure that such structures were rational, efficient and effective and sometimes found leadership to be lacking. A major source of confusion, especially in the "roll out" countries, was the creation of clusters alongside existing sector groups, which gave rise in some cases (Somalia and Uganda)

to two-tiered coordination systems (one for clusters, one for sectors). In ongoing emergencies, especially, field staff recommended that a thorough analysis of existing coordination mechanisms is necessary before using the cluster approach. Other key lessons regarding coordination structures include the need to ensure that:

- designated leads are assigned for major areas of humanitarian action in a given emergency, understand their roles and responsibilities, and report, in this capacity, to the HC;
- the cluster approach is not “added on” as an extra layer of coordination, but rather the principles and standards of the approach are used to raise the bar of performance of existing structures;
- consideration is given on how best to ensure valid participation by INGOs and national NGOs in all coordination mechanisms, bearing in mind the need to balance representation with the pragmatic need to keep meetings manageable and strategic;
- there is some forum for technical sector leads to discuss and propose strategies for ensuring a cross-sectoral (e.g. holistic) approach to the response, and integration of cross-cutting issues, which reports to a higher level, strategy/policy-making entity, such as an IASC CT;
- coordination structures are rationalized at both the capital and regional/district level and seek to minimize meetings and maximize participation to improve strategic decision making;
- to the extent possible, and depending on the context, that discussions about relief and early recovery (and where possible development) on a given issue (e.g. health) are discussed in a single forum, with the aim of fostering more natural linkages between relief and development, minimizing meetings, and ensuring that development takes preparedness for emergencies into consideration.

43. At the global level, coherence and coordination between global cluster leads and those areas for which clusters have not been created (e.g. education, food, agriculture and refugees) is considered by some to be too *ad hoc*. There is a need to ensure more systematic collaboration between the various leads at the global level to ensure a more complementary and coherent approach to addressing the concerns raised by the humanitarian reform. While it is acknowledged that some work is now underway to develop operational guidelines on cross-cutting issues, such as gender, HIV/AIDS, the environment and early recovery, it is felt that this guidance should build on existing work and be incorporated quickly into user-friendly “toolkits” for clusters as both the global and field level.

Issues requiring further discussion and action

There are a number of issues that have emerged from the Self-Assessment that require further action and which should be considered in discussions regarding further application of the cluster approach. These include:

Ensure that lessons identified in this report are applied in future use of the cluster approach. Key lessons include ensuring that gaps are adequately identified and addressed, global cluster leads provide the necessary support to their respective field groups, sector leads with the appropriate skill-set and training are appointed for priority areas of response, coordination mechanisms are efficient and inclusive, and facilitate cross-sector collaboration, IM systems are in place, and Humanitarian Coordinators, with OCHA support, lead the process effectively.

Translate agreed guidance into training and a practical “toolkit.” To improve the field’s understanding of the cluster approach, it will be necessary to translate agreed guidance, lessons and best field practice into training and a user-friendly, field-based “toolkit” with

standard operating procedures, operational guidance and checklists for “operationalising” the approach at the field level.

Develop additional operational guidance and resolve outstanding issues. It is recognized that many of the major policy issues concerning the cluster approach have been carefully defined in the revised Guidance Note following extensive consultation with partners in the field and at headquarters. However, some practical issues raised in the Self Assessment require additional action to avoid confusion at the field level. These include:

- Providing more explicit operational guidance on how sector leads at the field level should interpret their role in resource mobilization (mentioned in the ToR), especially in relation to the CERF, pooled funding mechanisms, Flash Appeals and CAPs.
- Providing practical guidance on the role of the early recovery cluster at the field level, as well as the role of sector leads in mainstreaming early recovery.
- Clarifying the operational mechanics of using the cluster approach in countries with integrated UN missions.
- Identifying and promoting the tools that are available to promote greater system-wide accountability to people affected by conflicts and disasters.
- While at global level, some areas of humanitarian activity are referred to as “clusters” and others are not, it is necessary to recognize that all areas of humanitarian activity should strive to achieve standards of leadership, capacity, preparedness, partnership and accountability. All areas of humanitarian activity should receive equal recognition and treatment.

Prepare for 2007 evaluation of the cluster approach. It is proposed that OCHA begin working with IASC partners immediately to ensure development of benchmarks for any future implementation of the cluster approach (against which the evaluation will measure progress), as well as a realistic timeline and methodology for the evaluation to be undertaken.

Actions for the IASC WG

1. The IASC WG is requested to take note of the findings of the Interim Self-Assessment, in particular when deliberating continued usage of the cluster approach.
2. The IASC WG is requested to endorse that OCHA lead the process to ensure timely follow up on the above-mentioned points, together with IASC and cluster lead partners.

Annex 1

Desk Review: A Summary of Formal and Informal Evaluations of Agencies' Efforts to Implement the Cluster Approach

Preface

This Desk Review highlights main trends, themes and key lessons drawn from more than 50 documents submitted to OCHA HRSU from various UN and non-UN IASC sources (see Annex 1 for list of documents provided to HRSU). The documents include various formal and informal observations and evaluations of the application of the cluster approach at the field level in both the four IASC-selected “roll out” countries (DRC, Liberia, Somalia and Uganda) and in “new” emergencies (e.g. Pakistan, Indonesia and Lebanon).

This Review is one aspect of the IASC Interim Self-Assessment of the Cluster Approach and will be complemented by field-based surveys and workshops in the four “roll out” countries and consultations with Global Cluster Leads. Its aim, therefore, is not to draw conclusions, as this will be done once all aspects of the Interim Self-Assessment are completed.

Given that this Review was dependent on material provided by key stakeholders in what was admittedly a very short time frame, it may not encapsulate all views or issues related to the cluster approach. Furthermore, the documents covered in the Desk Review each reflect on a point in time in a fast evolving process of roll out. Therefore, conclusions or lessons identified may have been surpassed by events or may have been incorporated into subsequent response or by subsequent clarification of policy guidance. The potential time lag of the Desk Review material is balanced, to some extent, by the validation against findings from the four field workshops.

Despite constraints in the methodology and timeframe of the Self-Assessment, there was a remarkable consistency of issues raised in nearly all documents, which suggests more or less consensus among field and headquarters-based practitioners on the core strengths and weaknesses of agencies' efforts to implement the cluster approach.

In some cases, this Desk Review draws examples from the documents that were submitted to HRSU in order to illustrate general challenges in applying the cluster approach. The result is that some clusters and/or emergencies are more represented or “in the spotlight” than others. The use of such examples is not intended to draw attention to or suggest criticism of particular clusters or sectors and should not be interpreted as such.

Cluster lead agencies, other organizations, and country teams that provided inputs—many of which were helpfully self-reflective and critical—should be particularly thanked for approaching the Interim Self-Assessment in the spirit of learning and transparency, which was its original intent.

Executive Summary of Main Trends, Themes and Lessons Identified

1. The findings of the Desk Review reconfirm the interdependence of the four main prongs of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda: ensuring predictability and greater accountability of humanitarian response; strengthening humanitarian leadership and coordination; strengthening partnerships; and improving the predictability and timeliness of humanitarian financing. It is apparent from the various documents that strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator system and working with donors to manage the competition that arises from unpredictable funding both have a direct bearing on the outcome of using the cluster approach.
2. The existing documents indicate that aspects of the cluster approach “showed worth” compared to previous ways of working together. Positive experiences of the cluster approach were more evident in new emergencies than ongoing emergencies. The following indicative comments suggest that for many, the cluster approach provided a structure and a forum for stronger, more effective information sharing and collaboration:
 - clusters were a visible forum for information sharing and forward planning;
 - the approach provided an “organizing framework” for response, that clearly identified coordination and decision making structures;
 - the approach encouraged colleagues to work together on multi-sectoral issues;
 - the approach is a “good thing” in that info sharing and coordination has minimized duplication and gaps;
 - “opportunity for information sharing” and “networking on the fringes of meetings”;
 - “the fact that a named agency was responsible for coordinating efforts in a particular area was helpful;”
 - “helped to promote accountability.”
3. There is not yet sufficient information and comparative analysis to conclude the extent to which the cluster approach has contributed to more effective humanitarian response, in terms of addressing needs and saving lives. However, in countries in which it has been used, the cluster approach appears to have made a predictable response more likely, by automatically triggering a designated group of organizations to deploy the necessary staff to “lead” response in key emergency sectors. For example, by the time of the Lebanon emergency, it was more clear which organizations would be responsible for mobilizing different aspects of the response, such as Logistics, Protection and Water and Sanitation, which, less than one year ago were considered “long-standing gap areas” by the IASC. This example stands in stark contrast to previous emergencies, such as Darfur, in which lack of agency mandate and responsibility for gap areas led to lengthy discussions, delays in response, and ad hoc solutions. Although there are clearly still important issues to be resolved related to the consistency of cluster performance, the lack of a common understanding of “leadership,” and internal management of clusters, the achievement of greater predictability in countries using the cluster approach is clearly a positive step forward.
4. Some gaps previously identified by country teams and IDD/inter-agency/donor missions in the “roll out” countries are beginning to be addressed. For example, some cluster lead agencies have expanded their presence to both provide greater sector coordination and increase programming (e.g. protection in Uganda and DRC, WASH in Liberia); groups of agencies are working on issues previously considered gaps (e.g. protection and return/early recovery planning), conducting more joint needs assessments and analysis, and attempting to agree on strategies and priorities. Again, while there are clearly still issues related to the level of participation and effectiveness of these initiatives, it is becoming more of a common practice to attempt to meet needs in previously considered “gap” areas.
5. The inability of the IASC to produce clear guidance on the intricacies of the new “cluster approach” and to disseminate this to the field at the beginning of the process led to considerable confusion at the field level and did not inspire confidence in the new approach. Poor and sometimes contradictory communication—from both headquarters to the field and field-level coordinators to country team members—as to the aims and modalities of cluster implementation contributed to an overall sense that the cluster approach was much more complicated and cumbersome than perhaps it needed to be. This in turn contributed to skepticism about the added value of the new approach, fostered resistance

to what was perceived to be a headquarters or UN “imposed” process and fed suspicions of those who believed they were less informed than others (though in most cases, most stakeholders were equally ill informed).

6. The IASC generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at the Country Level spells out the expected role of the cluster lead in terms of the practical support and services they are to provide to cluster participants. This TOR provides the basis for a new level of accountability to the HC. Yet dissemination of the TOR in roll-out countries has been slow and uneven, and few efforts have yet been made to train cluster leads in roll-out countries in how to carry out their new responsibilities. There is wide consensus that cluster leads have interpreted their roles differently, making it difficult for participants to know what to reasonably expect. A number of internal cluster management issues have been identified, including conflict of interest between the needs of the cluster, and the programme priorities of the agency leading the cluster; poor facilitation and meeting management by the cluster lead; and the need for dedicated leads, especially in new emergencies.
7. Many stakeholders expected Humanitarian Coordinators, with OCHA support, to establish mechanisms for cross-cluster coordination (especially information management) and integration of cross-cutting issues (such as gender, HIV/AIDS, etc.). In several cases, such structures and mechanisms were not put in place or considered effective.
8. There are some differences between the application of the cluster approach in new and ongoing emergencies. In new emergencies, the cluster approach was more readily accepted by humanitarian organizations as a standard way in which to organize a coordinated response, primarily because the new approach was not competing with existing humanitarian coordination frameworks. In ongoing emergencies (e.g. the IASC “roll out” countries), this was not necessarily the case. In the roll out countries, the cluster approach was in some cases (particularly Liberia and Uganda) perceived as “imposed” by headquarters. In these situations, there has been more difficulty in rationalizing the cluster approach with existing structures, which has caused in some cases duplication of coordination mechanisms, frustration with excess meetings, and further resistance to application. This was exacerbated by lack of clear guidance from the IASC about the aims and modalities of using the cluster approach.
9. Based on documents submitted for the Desk Review, it appears that efforts to implement the cluster approach in roll-out countries have not yet led to a significant strengthening of partnerships between UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations. However, tensions arising from the cluster approach have been a catalyst for frank, senior-level dialog at the headquarters level on the obstacles that make closer collaboration more difficult. A Global Humanitarian Platform has been established to agree on concrete measures to strengthen collaboration. A key issue at the field level was that the cluster approach raised expectations about partnership, but provided few feasible and practical recommendations for realizing this.
10. Much of the discussion on partnership has focused on the relationship between the UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations. However, issues of visibility and competition for funding, not to mention issues related to different programme priorities within the same sector appear to be as much an obstacle to closer collaboration between UN agencies as they are between UN and non-UN organizations, and do not necessarily ensure that that “the whole humanitarian response equals more than the sum of its parts.”
11. Competition for limited donor funding was cited as a major factor working against closer partnership and collaboration (in terms of establishing more common approaches to assessment, analysis, planning and prioritization). The fact that clusters in some places have been used by donors as a filter for selecting partners further undermines partnership. Yet, competition has been and will likely remain a reality in the aid business because, despite Good Humanitarian Donorship, most donors have not on the whole changed their funding behavior.
12. “Accountability” is a key principle of the cluster approach. However, the draft generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at the Country Level, which provides a detailed list of activities for which Cluster Leads are accountable, has not yet been widely disseminated and used in the roll-out

countries. There was initially a lot of concern that the cluster approach demanded accountability of non-UN actors to the UN. It took some time to explain to all humanitarian partners that this is not the case. Apart from the question of accountability of Cluster Leads to the HC, there is concern in the field that more needs to be done to ensure greater accountability to recipients of assistance and that this is not adequately addressed in the existing guidance on the cluster approach.

13. Many of the perceived problems of the cluster approach are, in fact, long-standing challenges to coordination that continue to persist despite efforts to reform the humanitarian system. These challenges include:

- the fact that humanitarian organizations have differing mandates and operational priorities, which makes agreement on priorities and joint planning difficult under any circumstances;
- establishing viable partnerships with a myriad of UN and non-UN, international and national humanitarian organizations while maintaining streamlined and efficient coordination mechanisms and strategic focus;
- weaknesses in the Humanitarian Coordinator system that contributed in some cases to poor overall management and coherence of coordination mechanisms;
- the reality of competition that exists between humanitarian organizations, driven mainly by the humanitarian financing system that makes it difficult to cede visibility or influence to a “lead” who may thereby attract more donor attention. For their part, donors have not, on the whole, applied Good Humanitarian Donorship principles to provide funding according to need, thereby exacerbating competition.

14. The humanitarian reform agenda, and the cluster approach, did not create these problems, and in fact, was conceived out of a desire to address them. However, many of the documents submitted for this Desk Review suggest that long-standing coordination challenges have become conflated with the humanitarian reform agenda. At the same time, there are a number of issues specific to the way in which the cluster approach was “rolled out” that need to inform the next phase of implementation. Maintaining the momentum of the humanitarian reform in the face of high expectations will be a key challenge for the next phase of implementation.

The following section outlines in more detail the extent to which implementation of the cluster approach at the field level met the aims of the cluster approach, as outlined in the IASC Preliminary Guidance Note, issued in July 2006. This section also highlights a major, unanticipated issue that arose during implementation, namely, the internal management of clusters.

Did the cluster approach help to clearly identify gaps in key sectors/areas of response and ensure predictable leadership and adequate response in these sectors/areas?

On the whole the cluster approach has ensured predictable leadership in key sectors/areas of response in roll-out countries, although there were different interpretations of “leadership” which created varying expectations. Few of the existing documents mentioned the IASC generic Terms of Reference, which defines the country-level cluster lead’s role primarily in terms of facilitating assessments, analysis, planning, response and monitoring within a particular area of activity. The ToR appears to have been seldom used by cluster leads, the HC, OCHA, or cluster participants to clarify roles and manage expectations.

In “new emergencies” (e.g. Pakistan, Lebanon), using the cluster approach helped to bring greater predictability to the response, by identifying clearer “leads.” For example, it was clearer in Lebanon than it was in the initial phases of the Darfur operation, which agency was, in principle, responsible for “leading” response in a particular area. Existing documents acknowledge that in both Pakistan and Lebanon, large-scale loss of life was averted. However, it is not clear the extent to which more effective leadership and coordination through the cluster approach contributed to successful outcomes.

Prior to the current humanitarian reform, the Internal Displacement Division (IDD) was tasked with identifying gaps in response in eight situations of internal displacement, and to propose solutions to ensure an effective collaborative response. Thus, IDD collected a good deal of information on major gaps in the four ongoing emergencies that were selected by country teams and the IASC for implementation of the cluster approach (DRC, Liberia, Somalia and Uganda). Among the common gaps observed by the IDD in each of the countries was: protection, emergency shelter, camp management (where camps existed), return and reintegration and recovery in areas of return. All of these gaps are cited in the Humanitarian Response Review. In addition, poor leadership at all levels (HC and sectoral) was often a factor contributing to poor overall response.

The IDD, together with inter-agency, NGO and donor partners conducted a number of missions to each of the “roll out” countries before and after the introduction of the cluster approach. Based on reports from these missions, and other sources, it appears that some gaps are beginning to narrow despite delays due to lack of funds for cluster leads to assume their new responsibilities, and lack of formal guidance about cluster implementation. This appears to be helping to bring greater coherence to the overall response to IDPs.

A more in-depth evaluation will be necessary to determine the impact of the cluster approach in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. That said, there is some evidence that gaps are beginning to be addressed and capacity is beginning to be enhanced through, for example, expanded presence, inter-agency assessments, gap analysis, and the development of common strategies. For example, in Uganda, DRC and Somalia, protection presence has expanded and there is greater agreement on priorities (although there are some questions as to the inclusivity of protection activities--see below under partnership). In Uganda and DRC the cluster approach provided a greater opportunity and incentive for relief and recovery organizations to collaborate more than they had to date on return and recovery efforts.

To what extent did the cluster approach help to create stronger partnerships between NGOs, international organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and UN agencies to address gaps in key areas of humanitarian response?

The documents submitted for the Desk Review suggest that the cluster approach has not yet helped to significantly strengthen partnerships between UN and non-UN actors in humanitarian response. However, the cluster approach has been a catalyst to begin a frank dialog at the headquarters and field

level between humanitarian organisations on the obstacles that make closer collaboration more difficult (see Chairs' Summary, Enhancing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action: A Dialogue Between UN and Non-UN Humanitarian Organisations, 12-13 July 2006). The Dialogue agreed to establish a Global Humanitarian Platform to formulate action plans for improving collaboration at the field level and increasing strategic cooperation.

At the field level the application of the cluster approach—which raised expectations about increased partnership and equality between UN and non-UN humanitarian organisations—has at times exposed long-standing tensions and distrust between the various aid communities. In short, the pace of “roll out” was far ahead of the attitude and behavioural changes needed within the system, and which now have an opportunity to be addressed through the new Global Humanitarian Platform.

A key issue in both new and ongoing emergencies was that there was insufficient guidance on how to feasibly realize “partnership” at the field level. One practical dilemma noted in various reviews of the cluster application in Pakistan, Somalia and Lebanon was how to include *national* NGOs in a meaningful way into strategic discussions. From the perspective of cluster leads and some OCHA staff, the issue was how, practically speaking, to facilitate strategic discussions with dozens or hundreds of different stakeholders. Concerns about diminishing returns of participation are real, and can lead to laundry lists of activities and projects, rather than to agreed strategies and priorities. In short, the field level coordination structures to facilitate valid partnership either do not yet exist or are inadequate.

A related issue is the extent to which individual NGOs can or should represent a “homogenous” or “unified” “NGO perspective.” Given the myriad of international and national NGOs in a given emergency (not to mention UN agencies), how do cluster leads and coordinators accommodate the myriad of interests? An ICVA review of the roll out of the cluster approach in the DRC (March 2006) highlights the dilemma of how existing coordination structures are insufficient:

“The selection process of the NGOs and the responsibilities around that NGO participation were unclear; no terms of reference were developed explaining what participation entailed. There was no clear discussion about who (if anyone) the NGOs in the HAG (Humanitarian Advocacy Group—the primary coordination body in Kinshasa) represented. The “responsibilities” of the NGOs in the HAG were also not clearly discussed or agreed. As such, there was no mechanism to feed in the views of other NGOs to the HAG nor was there a mechanism to report back to other NGOs on what took place in the HAG..... From the perspective of NGOs that participate in the HAG, as well as from the perspective of those NGOs that do not, the NGOs attending the HAG do not represent anyone except themselves: they participate in the meetings in their own right.”

The Red R/International Health Exchange “Report on Lessons Learnt, Emergency Shelter Cluster Hubs, Pakistan” (February 2006) also highlights the above problem and suggests the development of “clear, simple, easily translatable Terms of Reference setting out expectations and minimum requirements for [cluster] members.”

Another key factor cited as an impediment to partnership is the competition for visibility—especially in high-profile emergencies—which is invariably tied to competition for funding. Some NGOs and some non-cluster lead UN agencies perceive that the cluster approach will necessarily prejudice donors to fund cluster lead agencies, at the expense of other partners. Various pooled funding initiatives and the CERF—which the General Assembly has agreed cannot be dispersed directly to NGOs—have done little to allay this perception.

On the whole, despite the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, donor behavior still often does little to encourage collaboration. An academic working paper on the cluster approach by Ingar Falck Olsen and Jan Hystad, commented that the cluster approach is perceived by some NGOs as a threat to their autonomy and resource base. As a result, NGOs and UN agencies are “trapped in a ‘discourse of good intentions,’ that does not allow them to voice their mixed feelings about the cluster approach... the best alternative that remains is to say one thing and do the other [e.g. not collaborate in practice].” Olsen and Hystad conclude that only donors can effectively shape an incentive system to reward collaboration, and better results from joint humanitarian action.

The discussion on partnerships has focused primarily on non-UN humanitarian organizations. However, it would be wrong to assume that UN agencies entirely buy-in to the cluster approach. Especially at the field level, some agencies who have expertise in a given area of activity may see little incentive to being a participant in a cluster that is led by another UN agency with a similar competence. Some non-cluster lead agencies feel that the cluster approach gives exclusive visibility to “leads” to the detriment of “members.”

Another area related to “partnerships” is the role of governments. The lack of specific IASC mention of this matter in the earliest phases of the roll-out has caused some (including UN member states) to conclude that the UN has positioned itself over government as the “lead” in humanitarian emergencies. In some respects, this issue appears to have become overblown more by what was *not* explicitly said in IASC guidance notes, than what was said. The current version of the IASC guidance note related to clusters corrects this omission, stating the clear responsibility of the government for leading humanitarian response, where appropriate, and the role of cluster leads to ensure cooperation among international actors, appropriate linkages with government and local authorities, and capacity building.

To what extent did the cluster approach help to strengthen the accountability of Cluster Leads to the Humanitarian Coordinator for different aspects of the humanitarian response where this is lacking?

The long delay in providing cluster roll-out countries with specific guidance on the cluster approach, with detailed terms of reference of cluster leads, meant that little progress was made in ensuring any systematic accountability of cluster leads to HCs.

In some instances it was unclear, within cluster lead agencies, whether the cluster lead (individual) should “report” to the HC directly, or through the agency’s Representative. In addition, the documents suggest that overall, HCs may not have received much guidance and support in introducing the necessary mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the cluster approach. This appears to be especially true for ongoing emergencies, where the cluster approach was often perceived as “imposed” by headquarters and was in “competition” with existing coordination structures. In countries with new emergencies, where there was no prior humanitarian coordination structure, the cluster approach provided a clearer model for the division of labour and responsibilities.

According to the IASC ToR for HCs:

“The Humanitarian Coordinator is responsible for establishing and maintaining comprehensive coordination mechanisms based on facilitation and consensus building. These mechanisms should be inclusive of all the actors involved at the country level in the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection, including in particular all locally represented members and standing invitees of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).”

Given the above, there are a number of issues arising in the various reviews to take into consideration:

- In the four “roll out” countries, the cluster approach was initially added on as an extra layer of coordination, without due consideration to rationalizing existing coordination mechanisms (this has been corrected in some cases).
 - In Liberia, for example, this meant that the Early Recovery cluster was added to existing recovery and development mechanisms.
 - In Somalia, the cluster groups appear to have been added to a number of existing structures, some of which already included sector-based meetings similar to clusters. While humanitarian agencies appear to have appreciated the establishment of clusters in gap areas (particularly protection), there appeared to be no apparent justification—for example—to maintain both a nutrition sector group and a nutrition cluster group. Ten NGOs wrote to the HC in September 2006 calling for further rationalization of the coordination arrangements, and reducing the number of meetings that were straining limited NGO resources. [NB Apparently, these concerns are now being addressed.]

- An ICVA report on cluster application in Uganda states “responsibility for the absence of a focused, action-oriented humanitarian coordination structure, a clear humanitarian strategy, and a lack of consolidated information management system falls squarely with the HC.”
- The existing documents (for both new and ongoing emergencies) suggest that in most cases there has been limited progress to establish mechanisms to ensure cross-sector collaboration, and to ensure mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues, such as gender, HIV/AIDS, human rights and the environment.
- Several documents suggest that some OCHA field offices did not always as active a role as possible in promoting the cluster approach and in supporting its effective implementation.

To what extent did the cluster approach help to improve strategic field-level coordination and prioritization?

Improving strategic field-level coordination and prioritization has been the subject of previous efforts to strengthen humanitarian response, namely reform of the CAP (particularly efforts to improve strategic planning through the CHAP), the Sphere Project, and Good Humanitarian Donorship (particularly efforts to improve needs assessment and prioritization), among others. The current humanitarian reform, including the cluster approach, has perhaps not been articulated strongly enough as a continuation of previous efforts, and the result is that processes and tools that have been established previously have not always been sufficiently linked to or utilized in the application of the cluster approach.

As a result, the cluster approach—in and of itself—appears to be running up against the same challenges faced in previous attempts to improve strategic coordination and prioritization, without necessarily drawing on the tools created in previous reforms to bolster success.

A lessons learned report produced by the Shelter Cluster following the Pakistan earthquake notes that despite the existence of common tools and standards, most humanitarian organizations reverted to their own assessment and planning tools and standards during the emergency, making it difficult to organize around a common approach and work towards agreed objectives. A Red R/IOM review of the shelter cluster in Pakistan notes “confusion” among stakeholders on the status and expected role of standards and guidelines for cluster members in terms of “adherence to them, dissemination of them and resolution of any differences.”

An IDD report on cluster implementation in Uganda (March 2006) noted that “following a coherent approach [to protection] may prove to be a challenge given the respective mandates and programme priorities of the [participating] organization. Ensuring that these activities together add up to an overall improvement in the protection of IDPs will necessitate even greater coordination, prioritization and monitoring.”

An ICVA report on cluster roll out in Uganda notes that “the majority of international NGOs appear as project-driven with too little attention...to the effectiveness of the overall response.... On the whole, the NGO programmes and projects come across as a patchwork lacking in structure or pattern. The total of activities appears smaller than the sum of the parts.”

In both new and ongoing emergencies, the existing documents cite challenges to the internal management of clusters. The degree to which internal management would directly affect success or failure of the cluster approach may have initially been underestimated. Some of the main issues are:

- At the field level, each cluster took a different approach to their work, often picking and choosing which elements of the generic cluster lead ToR they would implement. In Liberia, for example, this resulted in different models for different sectors, which had a bearing on who participated (government and NGOs) and the focus of work (from Summary Report of UNICEF visit to Liberia to review the WASH cluster). The ToR was often not disseminated to cluster participants, making it

difficult for them to understand what they could reasonably expect from the cluster lead. At the same time, cluster leads often found it difficult to know what they could reasonably expect from cluster participants.

- In all new emergencies (and some ongoing ones), existing documents cite the need for a dedicated cluster lead (an individual) to facilitate cluster work, without having additional programme responsibilities. Combining cluster lead and programme roles often led to perceptions of a conflict of interest between the agency and the larger cluster. Cluster leads must not be overly bound by their own agencies' interests. They need to step outside of their normal domain of work if necessary.
- In Pakistan and Lebanon, documents cite the need for appropriate seniority and skill set (e.g. collaborative, team building, consensus seeker, good facilitator) to lead clusters.

ANNEX 1

Existing reviews/evaluations of Humanitarian Reform implementation: Background for IASC Interim Self-Assessment of Cluster Roll-Out Countries

(organized by date)

Document Title	Author/Source	Date
Humanitarian Response Review	Commissioned by the ERC and USG for Humanitarian Affairs	August 2005
Various IASC documents related to the cluster approach	IASC Secretariat	December 2005 – July 2006
Various OCHA/IDD/Inter-Agency mission reports to cluster roll-out countries to DRC, Liberia, Somalia and Uganda (pre and post cluster roll out)	OCHA/Various IASC partners	December 2004 – March 2006
Background Paper 1: Strengthening NGO Participation in the IASC	Beth Ferris	January 2006
Real time evaluation of the cluster approach in the South Asia earthquake	IASC	February 2006
Report on Lessons Learnt: Emergency Shelter Cluster Hubs, South Asia Earthquake, Pakistan	Red R/International Health Exchange	February 2006
The Evolving UN Cluster Approach in the Aftermath of the Pakistan Earthquake: and NGO Perspective	ActionAid	March 2006
Recommendations from the multi-donor mission to Uganda 12-17 March	Donors (Canada, ECHO, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States)	March 2006
The Roll-out of the Cluster Approach in the DRC	ICVA	March 2006
Initial OCHA Observations on Implementation of the Cluster Approach in DRC, Liberia and Uganda	OCHA	April 2006
Uganda Trip Report, Observations	ICVA	May 2006
Response, Lessons, Follow-up Recommendations (Pakistan)	Shelter Cluster	June 2006

ACF International Positioning <i>vis-à-vis</i> the Reform of Clusters	Action Contre la Faim	June 2006
Liberia Review of WASH Cluster	WASH Cluster Support Team	July 2006
Background Paper 2: Enhancing UN / non-UN Engagement at Field Level	ICVA, SCHR, InterAction, OCHA	July 2006
Background Paper 3: Overview of Consolidated NGO Views in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action	ICVA, SCHR, InterAction, OCHA	July 2006
Background Paper 4: Summary Paper on the Financing and Partnerships between UN and non-UN Humanitarian Organizations	ICVA, SCHR, InterAction, OCHA	July 2006
Chairs' Summary: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action, a Dialogue between UN and Non-UN Humanitarian Organizations	Jan Egeland, Beth Ferris	July 2006
Inter Agency Global WASH Cluster Review of Java WASH Cluster	WASH Cluster	August 2006
ReliefWeb Usability Tests, Highlights of Terminology Review "Cluster vs sector"	Telono (for ReliefWeb)	August 2006
Preliminary Findings and Recommendations: Somalia Real-Time Evaluation (Draft 1)	IASC Country Team, Somalia	August 2006
Email from Julie Dabo, Africa Humanitarian Action to HRSU regarding the interim self assessment of the cluster approach	Julie Dabo, Head of External Relations, Africa Humanitarian Action	September 2006
Commentary on the Implementation and Effectiveness of the Cluster Approach	Mercy Corps	September 2006
World Vision International Draft IWG Synthesis Paper: Cluster Approach	World Vision International	September 2006
Comments on the Preliminary Guidance Note on the Cluster Approach	Danish Refugee Council	September 2006
PowerPoint Presentation on lessons learned from the Cluster Approach in the DRC (for Nairobi regional workshop on Humanitarian Reform)	Andy Wyllie, OCHA Kinshasa	September 2006
PowerPoint Presentation on lessons learned from the Cluster Approach in Somalia (for Nairobi regional workshop on Humanitarian Reform)	On behalf of humanitarian organizations working in Somalia	September 2006

Letter from 10 NGOs to Eric LaRoche, RC/HC for Somalia	Danish Refugee Council, Oxfam Novib, Oxfam GB, Concern Worldwide, UNA Consortium, Save the Children UK, Gedo Health Consortium, Care International, ACF, NGO SPAS	September 2006
End of Mission Report: ProCap Deployment with UNHCR, Bunia, DRC	Irene Schmid, ProCap	September 2006
WASH Cluster PowerPoint Presentation to donors post Lebanon emergency	WASH	September 2006
Planned Inter Agency Global WASH Cluster Review of DRC	WASH Cluster	Planned for September 2006
Real Time Evaluation of UNHCR's Role in the Lebanon Emergency	UNHCR	October 2006
Keeping Recovery on Course: challenges facing the Pakistan earthquake response one year on	Oxfam International	October 2006
Evaluations by Key Counterparts of the Emergency Response in Lebanon	Key actors in the Lebanon response	October 2006
ToR for Review of the Emergency Shelter Coordination Group operating from Yogyakarta, Indonesia	IFRC	Expected in early October
Review of the Horn of Africa	OCHA ESU	Will be completed in October 2006
Working Paper: Negotiating Institutions in the Market for Humanitarian Relief: A Study of the Shaping of the Cluster Approach for Inter-Organizational Coordination	Ingar Falck Olsen and Jan Hystad	Not dated

Annex 5

UGANDA

'IN-COUNTRY SELF ASSESSMENT'

25 – 26 October 2006

INTRODUCTION

The Analytical Framework and Key Questions were distributed to the humanitarian community in Uganda to the IASC, the UN Country Team, and through the OCHA sub offices to all NGOs working in the districts.

The half-day meeting to discuss views was convened in Kampala. Attendees included UNICEF, WFP, WHO, Save the Children, Oxfam, ICRC, ECHO, COOPI, GOAL, IRC, ACF, UNHCR, World Vision, Caritas, AVSI, FAO, UNFPA, UNDP, OHCHR and the Humanitarian Coordinator. Some NGO participants came from Lira and Pader, two of the conflict affected districts, to convey the views of the non-UN community. All cluster leads and sub clusters participated. In total approximately 35 NGOs participated, including through the written submission of information from Gulu, in the Self Assessment of the Cluster Approach in Uganda, providing strong views and recommendations.

OVERVIEW OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

The Cluster approach was introduced with the visit of Dennis McNamara (OCHA) in November 2005. At the outset, there was minimal consultation with the field and as such it was viewed as UN imposed reform, thus limiting buy-in. Current understanding of the evolution of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda, including the Humanitarian Response Review is minimal. Moreover, many viewed it as being a system whereby funds would be channeled through UN agencies, an HQ driven process that did not allow any time for preparation in country. Today it is clear that the concept is only now reaching those at the district level. However many, especially in the NGO community accepted that the response in Uganda needed improvement and acknowledged the potential of the cluster approach in addressing the required change, but stated that the approach has yet to be fully rolled-out, especially at the district level.

The NGO community expressed appreciation for the formation and value of the IASC Country Team in Kampala in the spirit of 'partnership building.' However, it is felt that the approach has yet to utilize the best of NGO presence, especially in the districts.

While some see the cluster approach as a natural progression from the already functioning sector working groups, the majority view it as a completely new phenomenon, which has caused some resistance. In some ways the importance of the Reform Agenda has been diminished given the numerous missions and pilot initiatives that have been introduced in the country. Today, the objectives of the approach remain unclear, and there is an obvious need for continued training and education, which began in earnest only two months ago.

Individual cluster/sector guidance has been sporadic when it has been provided but by and large there has been very little in practical guidance from either the Global Cluster Leads, OCHA at large or lead agency HQs. In addition the confusion between 'cluster' and 'sector' as terms has not been helpful. The resulting vacuum has led to various interpretations and misinterpretations of the cluster approach. For example, cluster leadership is contingent upon the physical presence of the lead agency, rather than partnership building with those organizations with existing capacity. This has hindered the response. In the same vein, clusters are now receiving resources to increase their presence, although this comes only in the last few months. In this regard some of the UN Cluster leads strongly felt that the current assessment of the impact of the cluster approach is far too soon, with discussions being academic rather than realistic. The Preliminary Guidance Note reached Uganda six months after the humanitarian community was asked to implement the approach. The comparative advantage of the cluster approach is yet to be seen. Moreover it

was strongly felt that whilst the Global Cluster Leads have now acquired 22 million USD through the Global Cluster Appeal, the practical support provided to the field for implementation, both in terms of guidance, technical support, resources and tools has been nominal at best.

In retrospect, had the cluster approach been introduced in a phased manner with sufficient information, clear timelines and benchmarks based on consultation with the field, one may have been able to see further progress. However there is a current momentum to speed things up, and get out of 'business as usual.' The humanitarian community in Uganda has suggested that consistent support from headquarters in establishing the proper mechanisms, rather than short and periodic missions, may be a more worthwhile support for implementation. Moreover, stakeholders acknowledged that the most challenging aspect of the cluster approach, is the 'change in mindset' required, especially amongst UN agencies, in addressing their new role as facilitators within a more inclusive cluster meeting of active organizations. In this regard the continued sensitization of the humanitarian community in Uganda, coupled with reinforced guidance and proper investment in each cluster, would make a 'reformed' response more feasible and rewarding. Given the reality of the roll out thus far, any formal review will be regarded as inappropriate and futile if undertaken before the end of 2007.

I. Did the cluster approach help to clearly identify gaps in sectors/areas of response and ensure predictable leadership and adequate response in these sectors/areas?

There is a general feeling that the Cluster Approach has not been properly 'rolled-out' in Uganda, and as a result the understanding of the purpose of the Approach is limited. A common question such as the difference between a 'cluster' and a 'sector' remain troublesome. Furthermore, discussions to reconcile the approach with existing government structures to avoid parallel decision making processes has yet to be completed.

Predictable leadership is still in formation in Uganda. It provides a perspective of something new that is felt is a strong and important step towards a better response. The appointment of Cluster leads and distribution of their contact details is limited at the national level. Most individuals had cluster leadership added to their existing full-time job. The recruitment of dedicated cluster coordinators is on going and this is expected to improve the facilitation of the response in clusters with the arrival of dedicated staff in the next two months. However there remains, in some cases, a lack of understanding of the actual role of the Cluster Lead by the Cluster leads themselves, this ties into the previously mentioned issue of the need for a change of mindset. It was stated that some clusters currently are viewed simply as only the lead agency with its implementing partners. This prevents a major objective of the reform: more inclusive meetings amongst all actors which thereby strengthens the partnership of UN and non UN actors.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the approach has helped to clearly identify gaps in response compared to previous mechanisms. The previous sectoral working groups conducted needs assessments that identified gaps to a certain extent, however this is still need for improvement. Stakeholders acknowledge that at the very least, it 'has us thinking.' Whilst the cluster approach may have helped in identifying some gaps, "adequate response" has by no means taken place.

To cite one example, in Pader district NGOs strongly state that the cluster approach has yet to be implemented and gaps still need to be filled. In some cases (watsan, health, food security and protection) the cluster lead is not present, and in the absence of a cluster lead it is unclear who should fill their shoes. Meetings are irregular and attendance is also, in some cases is very low. Simple mapping tools (who, what, where) are yet to be fully utilized, thus limiting the possibility of strategic planning and harmonization of activities. Common cluster/sector work plans have yet to be developed and as such there is duplication, especially in the watsan area. **Priorities are established at the national level with little field consultation.** The theory of Cluster 'leadership' differs to that in practice and lends to confusion.

Participants Recommendations

- The role of the Cluster Lead (or designated focal point), and subsequent coordination amongst lead agencies must be clarified and reinforced in order to avoid duplication.

- Common information management tools to assist with gap identification are required.
- A ‘briefing package’ for newly arrived actors would reduce overlaps.
- NGOs requested that their role as a potential ‘Cluster lead’ should be discussed at the Kampala level, as well as clarity on the role of the responsibilities of the Cluster Lead at national level vis-à-vis district level.
- Humanitarian Reform sensitization needs to be continued.

II. *To what extent did the cluster approach help to create stronger partnership between NGOs, international organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and UN agencies to address gaps in key areas of humanitarian response?*

There is a greater **spirit of collaboration in terms of partnership building**, but the process of institutionalizing the cluster approach has been slow. NGOs acknowledged that their involvement in the IASC, and the transparent and open manner in which the Humanitarian Coordinator has lead the meeting has been encouraging. There is an increase in the participation of international NGOs, but the same cannot be said for national NGOs.

Some NGOs were uncertain that the changes found in meetings were the result of the cluster approach. NGOs expressed the **need for a uniformed strategy amongst the cluster leads in the activation of the cluster approach, with benchmarks within a clear roadmap**. In Lira it is felt that participation of NGOs has lessened due to the increase in the number of meetings, a contradiction to the spirit of the cluster approach. Whilst the UN may turn to their respective headquarters for guidance, there is not always such a counterpart available to the non-UN community, and the NGO consortia at the global level have yet to fulfill this role.

There was concern that the Government has yet to be brought fully on board with the process. In some cases the lack of government presence in meeting has limited the discussion of participants who see them as the decision making-body. There is a need to balance the humanitarian response with capacity building of the national authorities. It is still too early to see the impact in terms of beneficiaries.

The key components of the cluster approach, this being the ‘provider of last resort’ and ‘accountability’ required further clarity, especially in terms of the role of NGOs as cluster participants.

Recommendations

- Clear steps towards capacity building of national NGOs and national authorities is required.
- Need for reform sensitization and ‘re-packaging’ the cluster approach from that of a ‘new’ model, to a system that aims to ‘strengthen’ existing mechanisms.
- It would be useful in the Guidance Note to outline the difference between the management relationship of the UN agency and an implementing partner with the facilitation relationship of the cluster lead with cluster participants.

III. *To what extent did the cluster approach help to strengthen the accountability of Cluster Leads to the Humanitarian Coordinator for different aspects of the humanitarian Response where this is lacking?*

In practice ‘accountability’ to the Humanitarian Coordinator needs further improvement. There is a moderate amount of support provided by the Clusters leads to the HC and vice versa, which must be strengthened. It must be stated that there was little information regarding the issue of accountability at the beginning of the roll out. This is slowly improving, and as all stakeholders begin to understand and concept, especially that it is ‘two-way’, positive results are expected. **Meetings are currently focused on information sharing, rather than decision making**, and this too affects the level of participation.

The question was raised as to how to balance cluster accountability with interventions in an environment where the Government of Uganda has ultimate responsibility. Furthermore, **NGOs felt that accountability is primarily to donors** not to the cluster, cluster lead or the government.

The larger question of ‘leverage’ remains. What is the incentive for accountability? Without an incentive, beyond funding (the CAP is over 75% funded), it is difficult to formalize accountability mechanisms.

Participants Recommendations

- The capacity of Cluster Leads must be enhanced (IM support, support from Global Cluster leads, technical support etc...) and they in turn must be proactive in promoting information sharing and coherent strategies.
- Guidance on the responsibility of cluster participants is required.
- Clear definition of accountability beyond the fund-raising tool is required. (Accountable to whom? How? – Can you be expelled from a cluster? Can you be demoted from Cluster lead? What are the benchmarks, who reviews performance, who ultimately decides?)

IV. To what extent did the cluster approach help to improve strategic field-level coordination and prioritization?

Strategic planning and prioritization at the field level is improving, but there is still a long way to go. However there is **little operational field level coordination at present**. Linkages between clusters have yet to be addressed. Some clusters appear to have agency work plans ‘knitted’ together to form cluster work plans.

Integration of early recovery into planning is still a work in progress. **Cross cutting issues for the most part integrated into cluster strategies**. Although Human Rights is a cross cutting issue, there is a feeling that had it not been made a cluster, it would not have been properly addressed.

In order for proper prioritization, planning and coordination to take place an inclusive and standard needs assessment framework is required. In this regard **promotion of the NAF** (Needs Analysis Framework) as a comprehensive assessment tool for clusters would be useful. The Food Security sector’s utilization of the NAF has proved extremely beneficial as a foundation for the CHAP / CAP.

The issue of cluster membership, or participation, needs to be addressed. It is felt that a strong emphasis on ‘added value’ is required. Moreover in order to have participants ‘sign-on’ to cluster strategies, participants must have a certain level of responsibility. When there are large numbers in meetings, with representatives who are not equipped to take decisions, decision-making is hard and progress limited. Consistent measures should be undertaken to ensure clusters are as inclusive as possible.

Terminology must also be addressed. In Uganda the Food Security, Shelter, Non-Food Items, and Education Sectors, whilst remaining as sectors due to the understanding that they are not key gaps, operate along the lines of the cluster approach. Therefore converting Food, Education, Shelter, and Non-Food Items into clusters, with sector leads fulfilling the TORs of a Cluster Lead, would help maintain consistency and avoid confusion.

The success of the Cluster Approach depends largely on leadership and human resources. **Placing the right staff, with the appropriate background and skills, in the appropriate positions can make all the difference**. Profiles of staff within the cluster approach, in particular cluster coordinators, must be revisited and recruitment policies streamlined.

Participants Recommendations

- A comprehensive plan to disseminate the approach, especially to the Government, is required.
- Promotion of the NAF and the development of clear lines of reporting and reporting formats, both internally and externally, would be useful.
- Full time cluster coordinators are essential.
- Improved technical support and stand-by resources from Global lead to country level is required.

Annex 1

Cluster/Sector	What worked well/achievements	What did not work well/gaps
Food Security (sector) – FAO/WFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear mapping and identification of maps • Most positive contributor to the CAP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage of gaps to be worked on. • Limited common methodology of data collection and analysis. • Lack of clarity on whether a sector or cluster. Fulfilling the TORs of a CL needs to be addressed.
Health/Nutrition/ HIV/AIDS – UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Plan/Strategy – joint programming • Mapping • Better coordinated response. • More inclusive participation of stakeholders. • Training • Some guidelines developed • Advocacy for better health care in camps/returns areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporation of HIV/AIDS challenging • District level coordination, weaker than the national level. • Reporting needs improvement • Need to harmonize tools for service delivery. • Responsibility for filling gaps according to comparative advantage. • Need to be proactive with the government. • Information from assessments sometimes 3 months late.
Education (sector) – UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint needs assessments and standard setting. • Improved information flow amongst organizations and reporting. • Strategy developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved linkages with other relevant clusters needed.
Wat/San – UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation of duties has been useful. • Useful in presenting ideas to the districts. • Coordination improved • Mapping enabled gap identification. • Recruited a full time cluster coordinator (L5) underway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least advanced, poorly managed. • Suffering from a developmental approach. • Sub contracting may have to be considered. • Indicators decided upon late – lack of consultation with members. • Situation in districts variable. • Stronger focus on resourcing the cluster required. • Need a full time coordinator for each sector at a national level. • Coordination presence required at the district level. • No clarity on whether other agencies can take this on in the absence of the CL • Need to turn info into action. • Lot of work done but improvement needed. • Slow and irregular updating of information

Protection – HCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection strategy developed • Coordination of return-guiding principles for return movements • Freedom of movement at the centre of the Protection strategy with government endorsement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCCM not clearly defined and developed • Process unclear, membership criteria excluded some; precise status as a cluster/sub-cluster etc • No/little link between protection data and response • Confusion over relationships and roles between and of leads and membership • Lack of capacity (cluster lead presence) in Kitgum and Pader • Access has been a major constraint in response-predicate implementation of the cluster • Talking about the same issues in many different meetings due to number of sub clusters.
Protection sub cluster Camp Management - HCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gulu and Lira-agreement with NGOs for Camp Managers; • Background: Formed as was decided protection would be improved in camps through establishment of a CMCC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many camps (258) • Lack of clarity in the strategy and goals of • Very late start (Aug 06) • HC’s political decision (status as a sub-cluster) – to keep HCR working on CM. • Instead of mainstreaming protection in camp management, limited the activities of CM that do not now correspond to traditional activities of a CM cluster. • Current debate as to whether it should be separated.
Protection sub cluster SGBV - UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum for information sharing • Better planning (CAP) • Strategy expedited by the cluster. • Training of stakeholders in the field • Started a process of mapping referral chain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely due to previous work of UNICEF • Limiting as other gender issues fall between the cracks, ie. Access to food, tend to focus on sexual violence. • Felt that it would be better to have a ‘Gender Cluster’
Protection sub cluster Child Protection - UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainings have taken place • Common tools developed • Increased number of beneficiaries reached • Sub cluster strategy - roll out at district level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to develop a common referral tool • Has not changed from previous structure – no real added value. • Limited human resources.
Protection sub cluster Human Rights – OHCHR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy now in place, but was put together before the cluster was established. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No real change

Early Recovery - UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Needs assessments resulted in joint understanding of needs within each cluster. Prioritization was therefore easier.• Step forward to have a focal point for coordination.• Improvement in linkage between ER and Returns.• Not one agency's voice, but rather everyone. Previously only one.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confusion that other clusters were also sectors, which affected ER as a cross cutting issue.• Not enough resources to cover number of returnees.
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Annex 2

Sources

- 1) Consolidation of comments by OCHA Lira sub office.
- 2) Consolidation of comments from over 12 NGOs based in Gulu District.
- 3) Consolidation of comments by COOPI, Pader District.
- 4) Half Day Meeting, Kampala, 26 October. Participants UNICEF, WFP, WHO, Save the Children, Oxfam, ICRC, ECHO, COOPI, GOAL, IRC, ACF, UNHCR, World Vision, Caritas, AVSI, FAO, OHCHR and the Humanitarian Coordinator.

Annex 4

SOMALIA

'IN-COUNTRY SELF ASSESSMENT'

30 October 2006

INTRODUCTION

The Somalia IASC took the initiative to request that Somalia be added to the pilot countries with purpose of enhancing the profile of Somalia. The IASC is led by the HC with participation of 7 UN agencies, 7 NGOs and with ICRC as an observer. The IASC holds regular consultations with donors. The piloting of the clusters model coincided with the onset of drought conditions in early 2006 (the worst in a decade), which exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation. To date there are 8 clusters in place namely Food (led by WFP), Agriculture & Livelihoods (led by FAO and co-chaired by ASEP, a local NGO), Health (led by WHO), Nutrition (led by UNICEF), Water/sanitation (led by UNICEF), Education (led by UNICEF), Protection (led by UNHCR) and Logistics (led by WFP), most of the clusters were established in January 2006.

Roll-out of clusters at field level was hampered by limited humanitarian access except for Bakool and Bay regions (where local reconciliation efforts enhanced humanitarian access); Wajid (Bakool region) became the hub for coordination at field level, mainly as of March onwards. Meetings in other regions were held on an ad-hoc basis and Nairobi remained the base for more regular coordination meetings.

It must be noted that security and absence of sustained humanitarian access in south-central Somalia (where humanitarian needs are most acute), represent key challenges impacting assessments, coordination, gap filling and the overall response.

Overview of methodology

The Analytical Framework was distributed to the UN and non-UN community prior to the half-day workshop. Initial written feedback was received from the Education, Watsan and Nutrition clusters. The workshop included 22 participants (8 national NGOs, 4 international NGOs and 7 UN Agencies.)

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

I. Did the cluster approach help to clearly identify gaps in sectors/areas of response and ensure predictable leadership and adequate response in these sectors/areas?

The clusters have developed during the course of the year with **individual performance varying greatly**. It is acknowledged that this is **still a learning process** and as such it is **too early to draw conclusions**. Most clusters made efforts to map ongoing activities in their respective areas of expertise, which facilitated a certain level of coherence and limited large-scale duplications. Few clusters managed to conduct interagency assessments, as mentioned above security and lack of sustained access were among the major constraints.

It is generally felt that the approach has helped to identify gaps. However there is ambiguity as to the extent to which the cluster approach itself has resulted in an adequate response. Some felt that progress in response was largely due to the drought itself, rather than the application of the cluster approach, arguing as to how exactly the impact of the approach and subsequent gap filling and response would be measured. While the clusters initially focused on drought response, in progress the clusters' activities expanded to cover other relevant humanitarian issues including displacements and contingency planning.

Prior to the application of the cluster approach there were a large number of overlaps, which have been and continue to be addressed. Furthermore there is **greater prioritization of activities**, which helped to avoid overlap. The **gaps are known, but have yet to be comprehensively addressed**. Humanitarian actors

acknowledged that with the application of the cluster approach **protection has finally been placed on the agenda.**

Concerning predictable leadership, **the overall humanitarian reform is seen to be UN centric**, with the general feeling that “if you want predictable leadership, you need a leader that is acceptable to everyone.” The appointment of cluster leads provides stakeholders with a ‘port of call,’ however, the ability of cluster leads to address gap filling and act as provider of last resort is weak. **Neither NGOs nor the UN realistically have the capacity to fulfill the role of ‘provider of last resort’ in the context of Somalia.**

Some of the issues addressed in this section will be revisited in the following questions.

Recommendations

- There is need for better dissemination of the roles of the cluster leads.
- The process of appointment of cluster leads (through the IASC) needs to be better publicized .
- Dedicated cluster leads/ coordinators (individuals) are required.
- Before implementing the cluster approach, a proper analysis of existing coordination mechanism is required.
- Success of local NGO co-chair leads has been seen in the Livelihoods cluster. Replicating this model in other clusters should be considered, along with related criteria.
- In Somaliland and Puntland, clusters should be considered within the already established sector coordination structures, lead by the Government. Where there is no coordination in place, the cluster approach should be used as a starting point.
- Practical challenges of national NGOs participating in the cluster approach, needs to be addressed.

II. To what extent did the cluster approach help to create stronger partnership between NGOs, international organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and UN agencies to address gaps in key areas of humanitarian response?

Some NGOs stated that their drought response operations were already running before the cluster approach was introduced, and with their long term experience in Somalia were equipped to carry out assessments, develop and implement response without being tied to a broader coordination mechanisms. As in the past, many agencies coordinated at field level and not at the Nairobi level. In general, operational presence and capacity of UN agencies and NGOs remain limited, particularly in central and south Somalia.

With the engagement of the NGOs at country-level IASC, the approach has contributed to more inclusive decisions making at a strategic level. A number of INGOs are preparing position documents on the Cluster Approach, which should trickle down to the field level to ensure that positions are organizational rather than individual. It was acknowledged that **few INGOs operating in Somalia have information on how involved their agency is at Geneva level and this creates inconsistencies in positions and approaches.**

UN post-drought analysis highlighted NGO capacity as a challenge to adequate drought response. **NGOs felt the pressure placed upon them by the cluster leads was unwarranted** as NGOs were responding based on their capacity which depended more on the availability of adequate human resources than availability of funds.

The fact that **NGOs could only access CERF funds through a UN agency** was felt to reinforce the UN-centricity of the humanitarian reform. **NGOs do not wish to be too closely associated with the UN when there is a perception of the blurring of lines between the political and humanitarian mandate.**

While some clusters endeavored to apply common standards, approaches to partnerships remain largely inconsistent, including contractual arrangements, hampering the speed and efficiency of operations and undermining trust among the various partners. The concept of partnership needs further exploration and debate, as a sub-contractual arrangement is not true partnership.

Partnership in the Somalia context seems to be funding related. Some felt that NGOs are viewed as implementers with the cluster lead agency taking the role of the donor and ‘leader’. **The spirit of partnership on equal footing is hence seen as problematic under the current cluster system.** . Equal partnerships require a change of mind-sets and building of mutual trust.

A considerable portion of the humanitarian response has been mobilized through informal channels engaging business communities, Diaspora and Islamic charities. These initiatives, some far more significant than international community contributions, have not been adequately documented. **Engagement with these key actors, including with non-traditional donors, must be strengthened.**

Partnership and meaningful consultation with local authorities and affected communities is almost non-existent in some areas. Field consultations were often conducted in an ad-hoc manner with more emphasis on donor requirements than beneficiary input. **Main challenges include restricted humanitarian access and lack of effective government institutions to support implementation of projects.** Unified positions vis-à-vis local authorities have yet to be realized.

As many INGOs are able to access funds directly, there is little advantage seen in accessing money through the cluster. There is strong feeling that independence, neutrality and commitments to agency strategic objectives must be protected. The ‘value-added’ of funds being channeled through UN agencies was also questioned. **However, the approach strengthens potential funding for national NGOs.**

In Somalia, donors have participated in cluster meetings and invited proposals. **Many proposals were submitted by the INGO directly to the donor without input from the cluster lead.** For the NGOs, this method is workable. For the UN however it shows a lack of support by the donors for the cluster approach. Whilst the aim of the cluster approach is to pull everyone together under a single strategic plan, with a single funding appeal, **donors often approach individual agencies and NGOs, in contradiction to the spirit of the approach**

Partnerships depend on the good will of agencies and require a conscious effort to build trust over time. This trust will allow for equal debate and analysis of the issues rather than agencies protecting their position. It is possible to strike a balance – protect independence and work successfully within the clusters. One cluster – Livelihoods identified a national NGO co-chair, which worked well. This approach was not successful in other clusters.

Partnership and accountability are inextricably linked.

Recommendations

- The role of donors within the cluster approach, in particular the relationship with NGO and UN agencies, must be assessed and relevant recommendations made.
- The balance of power within a cluster (UN versus international NGOs and national NGOs) must be recognized and steps taken within the cluster to address equity.
- Roll-out of the approach must respect the autonomy of the agencies/organizations.
- UN, NGOs and donors who want to work with local partners need to build their own capacity with regards to monitoring and support systems that are required.

III. To what extent did the cluster approach help to strengthen the accountability of Cluster Leads to the Humanitarian Coordinator for different aspects of the humanitarian Response where this is lacking?

Accountability remains rhetoric, as there is no clarity on what happens if a cluster lead cannot fulfill its responsibilities. Global cluster leads must commit to supporting the country cluster leads in terms of finances and personnel. Each cluster lead agency requires a designated full-time cluster lead person. **This would serve to separate the role of the cluster lead from the mandate of the agency, which to date has been problematic. A dedicated cluster lead needs to be of a person of high caliber with emergency**

coordination experience who can pull actors together, provide a vision to the process, and develop consultative work plans with agreed upon indicators and benchmarks.

Some NGOs feel that they are viewed as implementers with the cluster lead agency taking the role of donor and leader. This raises issues on ‘partnership’ and the aspect of equality in this partnership and also of accountability. If, as in the case of Somalia, the Cluster lead is not in a position to implement at all nor act as the provider of last resort, pressure is placed on NGOs to expand and when the gaps are not covered, NGOs are cited as (part of)the problem.

Some NGOs also feel that ‘accountability’ within the cluster is questionable, especially if an agency has independent resources and is not looking for funding from within the cluster. In these cases, it is a relationship of information –sharing rather than the cluster coordinating the activities of an agency and reporting successes of that agency as a ‘cluster’ achievement.

A large number of field-based staff of both UN and NGOs lack seniority and are not empowered to make decisions on behalf of their organizations, which limits the effectiveness of coordination forums held at field level.

Capacity building of local partners needs to be supported with adaptations in funding and reporting systems to ensure mutual accountability.

Recommendations

- Indicators and targets should be derived from a cluster consultative process that includes the beneficiaries to ensure a more effective response.
- Careful recruitment of suitable dedicated cluster coordinators/leads is important as this serves to strengthen accountability within a cluster.
- In addition to dedicated cluster leads, for Somalia, clusters must also have field-based coordinators and adequate resources to facilitate the implementation

IV. To what extent did the cluster approach help to improve strategic field-level coordination and prioritization?

The clusters model has **generated an opportunity to handle humanitarian concerns in a comprehensive manner, and there is general improvement in field level coordination, however there is still a disconnect between Nairobi and the field which must be addressed.** Efforts have been made to ensure complementarity amongst the clusters. Most cluster leads eventually drew up joint response plans, mainly for the drought response. These varied from cluster to cluster ranging from stocktaking of ongoing/planned interventions to more strategic planning including prioritization. **Whilst there was greater information sharing, coordination of strategies needs to be improved. Little attention has been paid to cross cutting themes such as gender and HIV/AIDS.**

In Somalia, some clusters are not in accordance with global arrangements, namely Livelihoods, Food and education. While the need for flexibility at country level is recognized, this diversion from globally agreed frameworks questions leadership at global level.

Whilst it may be too early to evaluate the roll out of the cluster approach, the assessment allows for corrections and adjustments in the evolution of the approach.

Some clusters experienced rapid turnover of their leads and some assumed this new responsibility as an additional task to their regular job functions, which impacted negatively on the response. Support from Global Clusters has been good in some cases, with guidance and technical support, but weak in others.

Harmonizing cluster coordination processes with the existing coordination mechanism caused some confusion in the beginning, **creating a parallel coordination structure, rather than ‘strengthening’ existing**

mechanisms. This inevitably led to more meeting and requests for information that in turn reduced participation and buy-in, especially from the NGOs and some UN agencies, who felt that more time was spent on providing information than being operational. **Furthermore some agencies felt uncomfortable with decision making taking place within the cluster, especially in their absence.** In an effort to rationalize meetings , a decision was made to merge the sectoral working groups and the clusters of health, water/sanitation and education. The nutrition stakeholders recognized the need for common nutrition sectoral working group and cluster meetings and have embedded the cluster coordination issues into the existing coordination without compromising the accountability on the emergency needs.

It is felt that the success of the cluster approach depends on the goodwill of participants. **Much of the success in coordination is personality based** and thus the recruitment and human resources aspect of the cluster approach must be carefully considered, with the **recruitment of staff** with the right profile for the right job.

To support coordination **good quality information management is required.** This has to date been rather weak across some of the clusters. Furthermore, **there has been confusion on who take ultimate responsibility for managing information.** A proactive approach to gathering information is required, but this raises the question as to the usefulness of the information itself. **Information and the interpretation of data must be meaningful and inclusive.**

Recommendations

- Dedicated information management for each cluster is required.
- Clarification on the role of OCHA within the cluster approach, as well as their position on information management is required.
- Support from Global clusters must be better publicized and more rapidly disbursed.
- As above, recruitment of suitable dedicated cluster coordinators/leads as well as field based coordinators will bridge the disconnect between Nairobi and the field.

Annex 1

(This does not include all clusters, but only those who have provided information. Many other agencies participated in the self-assessment workshop which did not cover the attached matrix.)

Clusters	What worked well / achievements	What did not work well / gaps
Emergency Shelter	The establishment of the Emergency Shelter is in process and the cluster is yet to be endorsed by the IASC in November. The first comprehensive approach to shelter has taken place over the last three months bringing all actors working in this area together for the first time. The Shelter cluster has now provided joint projects for the 2007 CAP and are awaiting the outcome as the real test to whether strategic planning works.	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mapping of health facilities & dissemination of information ▪ Identification of gaps ▪ Development of response plans (mainly for drought-affected areas in south Somalia) ▪ Appointment of a dedicated cluster focal point at field level (based in Wajid) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High turn over of cluster leads ▪ The cluster could have worked within the existing sectoral working group) ▪ Room for improvement regarding strategic planning
Camp Coordination and management	Not relevant	
Wat/San	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to quantify the impact stating that following the cluster approach, 62% of beneficiaries were accessed compared to 42% previously. ▪ Application of common standards ▪ Development of response plans (mainly for drought-affected areas in south Somalia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some standards were not realistic given the context of Somalia
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The cluster was embedded with the nutrition sectoral working group at an early stage and hence the number of meetings was rationalized ▪ Effective early warning and monitoring ▪ Standardized protocols in the malnutrition management and the assessment procedures ▪ Number of selective feeding programmes increased e.g. SFP sites increased from 9 (in April) to 34 (in Oct) in the five most drought affected regions; ▪ The number of children rehabilitated/under rehabilitation in the selective feeding programmes has increased significantly ▪ Mapping of programmes and elaborate gap analysis ▪ Intervention data bases updated regularly ▪ The integrated programming concept well embraced though yet to be realized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Availability of partners with capacity to implement particular nutrition programmes ▪ Insecurity hindered expansion plans ▪ Insecurity hindered coordination meetings in some areas of concern ▪ Resource inadequacy (funds, qualified staff to implement highly specialized nutrition programmes) ▪ Integrated programme implementation taking time to be initiate
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integrated Logistics Cluster Database, pooling of resources (joint use of cargo by air & sea, overland transport & warehouses), identification of bottlenecks & advocacy ▪ Within 6 weeks, logistics capacity (tonnage moved) increased 5x, new corridors opened up to respond to the drought, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cluster deactivated without clear decisions being communicated to cluster members
Emergency Telecommunication	Not relevant	

Clusters	What worked well / achievements	What did not work well / gaps
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Putting Protection finally on the agenda and identification of protection gaps ▪ Initiatives established by the Protection Cluster include Population Movement Tracking, Protection Monitoring Network , IDP profiling exercise (first phase completed), strengthening protection capacities through training of trainers, IASC joint IDP strategy in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus mainly on gap analysis & coordination with minimal operational response ▪ Poor field presence in south-central
Early Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The notion of Early Recovery as a cross-cutting issue with relevance to each Cluster, and particular relevance to the Somali situation, was adopted across the board. ▪ Early Recovery has been established as a “Working Group” and not a Cluster. Roll-out is beginning at end-2006. ▪ The Somalia Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) and area-based coordination by the RC’s office will provide a framework for interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confusion over the evolving definition of Early Recovery during the CAP process. ▪ The Working Group needs to further sharpen the working definition of Early Recovery within the Cluster context. ▪ The Working Group should also aim to clarify how the Working Group relates to the Clusters, to ensure Early Recovery is treated onwards both as a cross-cutting <i>and</i> cluster issue.

Clusters	What worked well / achievements	What did not work well / gaps
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinated response among different actors (NGOs and UN Agencies); Mobilization of Resources; Accountability of the emergency response. ▪ Mobilization of resources on behalf of partners ▪ Involvement of key stakeholders ▪ More than 20,000 pupils enabled to resume schooling (54% of target), emergency school feeding program developed (UNICEF, WFP & other educational partners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logistic difficulties. ▪ Despite the immediate mobilization of agencies and donors for the drought response, delays in the funding release resulted in a delayed response from the partner NGOs. ▪ Lack of reliable partners in the Juba and southern Gedo regions resulted in partial geographical gaps of the response plan. ▪ Security problems and difficult access to certain location resulted in difficulties in monitoring the response at field level. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The volatile political situation prevented an effective involvement of the national authorities for the drought response ▪ Nairobi based cluster meetings probably resulted in a poor involvement of the affected population. ▪ Inadequate capacity building of national institutions & national NGOs ▪ Lack of clear link between relief and development at the early phases
Livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordination at strategic level, provision of technical expertise & guidance by the cluster lead ▪ Strong engagement of national NGOs, a national NGO has co-chaired the cluster ▪ Development of response plans (mainly for drought-affected areas in south Somalia) ▪ Over half a million productive animals treated, fully meeting the target ▪ De-stocking of 30,000 shoats (100% of target) & 1,000 cattle (3% of target) & seed provision to 45,000 HH (50% of target) 	
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geographical allocation of responsibilities among the respective agencies (avoid duplications). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic coordination need to be improved, lack of common methodologies

Annex 3

IASC INTERIM SELF-ASSESSMENT
CLUSTER APPROACH IN ROLL-OUT COUNTRIES
Workshop Report
LIBERIA
26 October 2006

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Attendance: HC
INGOs, the Management Steering Group of INGOs
National NGOs
Government of Liberia (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Liberia Reconstruction and Development Commission)
Donors (ECHO, OFDA)
Cluster Leads
ICRC

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Country Context

- i. It was decided to adopt the Cluster Approach in Liberia in November 2005 by the UN Country Team, in order to improve predictability, accountability, effectiveness of and partnerships of humanitarian action. By February 2006 an Inter-agency Standing Country Team had been established to ensure participation in and to oversee the implementation of the approach. Individual Clusters developed terms of references and action plans throughout 2006.
- ii. There are a number of characteristics that may differentiate Liberia from other Cluster Approach pilot countries. Liberia is a country in transition from relief to recovery, though it is recognised there will still be pockets of significant humanitarian needs across Liberia for some time to come. Contingent on regional political developments humanitarian needs may also re-emerge. This is seen, by some, as testing the role of the Cluster Approach as a concept designed to improve the effectiveness (and efficiency) of emergency response, as it has been introduced at the final stage of an emergency.
- iii. A new Government was for the first time elected towards the end of 2005 through a transparent and fully democratic process, being inaugurated in January 2006. Moreover, there is no UN OCHA to support the Cluster Approach process in Liberia. The humanitarian coordination function has been subsumed into the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). These factors have caused the relevance of choosing Liberia as a Cluster roll-out country to be questioned by some stakeholders at the country level.
- iv. The issue of 'humanitarian space' has been raised by several humanitarian actors given the integration of humanitarian coordination in the UN Mission in Liberia and some NGO Cluster partners feel this may have a bearing on the Cluster Approach in the country.
- v. The Cluster Approach was overlaid onto an existing and partially functional sectoral and area-based coordination mechanism without much understanding of how best to adapt the approach to existing systems or how to extend it to the county level, though there was an understanding that the approach was intended to enhance rather than supplant existing mechanisms.
- vi. Consideration continues to be given to how best to fit Clusters with – and provide support to - increasingly functioning Government structures and strategies as these are coming into place, such as the Government's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP) and the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC).
- vii. Awareness of how to bring about the Cluster Approach, and the implications and benefits offered by the approach were initially low. This stemmed from what is perceived to have been inadequate preparedness and proactive promotion of guidelines on the part of the IASC and UN OCHA. Initial confusion led to a certain scepticism about what the added value would be in a post-emergency, transitional scenario. As a result, buy-in was initially weak and participation was often limited.
- viii. The transition of the Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) into the National Information Management Centre. (NIMAC), reflecting a shift from relief to recovery and concomitantly a greater emphasis on building Government's information management capacity, means that there is no longer a structure solely devoted to provide information for humanitarian planning and response.

- ix. Given poor capacity and sometimes unclear structures, the question of when and where Government assumes leadership of Clusters remains unclear. There is, for example, no singular Government Ministry or institution dealing with water and sanitation issues.
- x. Initially there was an information gap between global Cluster Leads, UNOCHA and the IASC and the country level. This meant that organisations acquired information through other channels. Though there has been great improvement, there needs to be continued focus on active communication, not only within Clusters, but also within the UN system – with the OCHA-Humanitarian Reform Support Unit playing a central role in ensuring that communications are maintained and strengthened.
- xi. The development of the County Support Teams to build capacity for and support Government planning at the county level provides an opportunity for linkage with, and support for, the Clusters at the county level.
- xii. This self-assessment was considered timely and relevant by participants as it can be used as a “spring-board” for participatory transition planning

1.2 Workshop Methodology

- i. The workshop was based on the Core Learning Group’s Analytic Framework and outline methodology paper. Accordingly, it looked at achievements and outstanding ‘gaps’ in the overall Cluster Approach as perceived by some fifty participants by Cluster (these are listed at Annex A). Each was presented by a member of the relevant Cluster. This was followed by Focus Group discussions which were then presented in plenary session for additional comment. The four Focus Groups explored the key aspects that underpin the rationale for the Cluster Approach, namely: To what extent has the Cluster Approach
 - o been able to identify and address gaps in humanitarian assistance
 - o helped build partnerships between humanitarian actors
 - o helped improve coordination within and between Clusters
 - o improved accountability

A final plenary discussion was then held on aspects of the Cluster Approach peculiar to Liberia in the context of the UN Integrated Mission, UNMIL, and its application in post-emergency transition.

2. OVERVIEW OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

- i. Given that Liberia is the pilot country with the most pronounced transitional stage characteristics, there is a limited knowledge-base on the usage and lessons learned from Clusters in a transitional setting. This has resulted in different interpretations and applications of approaches by individual Cluster Leads. Therefore there is a need to articulate transitional mechanisms - based on country characteristics and needs – through a global and national participatory process.
- ii. The implications of participation, and the value added of this participation, in Clusters remains unclear for some humanitarian actors. As a result, ‘buy-in’ can vary. Consequently there needs to be a clear strategy in terms of ensuring full engagement of partners. National NGOs are inadequately represented in the process.
- iii. Awareness of “the vision” of the Cluster Approach could be enhanced through distribution of user-friendly and relevant country-specific information to all stakeholders at country level. A clear understanding needs to be developed of how the County Support Teams can best link to the Cluster Approach.
- iv. Stakeholder groups should be encouraged to feed into revision and updating of guidelines and Terms of Reference for each Cluster.
- v. The IASC Country Team could consider formal and systematic monitoring of Cluster performance against agreed criteria, and increasing utilisation of the ‘space’ for cross-Cluster dialogue with particular emphasis on integrated planning and inclusion of cross-cutting issues when doing so.
- vi. Development of standardised operating procedures, together with training in ‘strengthening partnerships’, ‘coordination management’ and ‘information management’ for Cluster Leads (i.e. those they appoint to act as Coordinators), and key partners - along the lines of CAP training - would be welcomed by the Clusters
- vii. The Cluster Approach as a concept is useful in as much as it provides a more focused forum for engagement of multiple stakeholders. In the transition phase, Clusters can be phased out to become part of the regular coordination and line management function of Government according to a specific timeframe and benchmarks.

3. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEMATIC AREA

3.1 GENERAL

3.1.1 Added Value to Date

- i. The introduction of Clusters as a reformed approach to leadership and coordination in January 2006, and the establishment of an IASC Country team enabled the UN and its partners to further develop and improve humanitarian coordination in

Liberia. The process is also continues to contribute to the forging of stronger partnerships amongst Ministries of the new Government, the donor community, non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations system.

- ii. Application of the Cluster Approach in Liberia has not been without its challenges. Cluster Leads, more used to managing IDP and refugee re-settlement and implementing long-term national development programmes, initially struggled to meet the expectations associated with the shorter-term humanitarian role demanded by the Cluster Approach. However, a more holistic multi-sectoral approach to the completion of the returns process and ensuring the sustainability of return has been stimulated by the Cluster concept. It has also allowed the mobilisation of CERF funds to meet priority needs in an otherwise uncertain funding environment.

3.1.2 Outstanding Issues

- i. Clusters are, by definition, emergency-focused. Those that remain during post-emergency transitions do so to provide an overall planning framework until such time as GOL can take on its responsibilities. This is especially true of the Early Recovery Cluster, where aspects of governance, environment, livelihoods restitution, and the rule-of-law, for example, needs to be mainstreamed in Cluster planning.
- ii. There is a risk of duplication of effort when 'docking' the Cluster Approach onto existing sectoral coordination mechanisms; a duplication which all-too-quickly may result in 'meeting overload' and disengagement. This situation can easily be exacerbated in transitional settings where national and local coordination structures can often parallel the humanitarian coordination architecture set up to respond to the initial crisis.
- iii. Clear Work plans (with indicators) and Terms of Reference need to be put in place by each Cluster in order to ensure a clear understanding of responsibilities within both Government and the aid community. This will also enable the measurement of progress towards pre-determined benchmarks and targets.
- iv. It is difficult to judge the impact of the Cluster Approach if the factors that lead to, or constrain enhanced performance have not been outlined and subjected to cost-benefit analysis. In Liberia there is an absence of such benchmarks.
- v. It was not clear to many participants why Liberia was chosen as a roll-out (pilot) country for the Cluster Approach as: a) OCHA is not present to support its implementation; and b) the emergency phase was largely considered to be over. In the absence of UNOCHA providing support for the Cluster Approach in an integrated mission, it should be considered what the implications and possible additional requirements might be to successfully implement the concept.

3.1.3 Recommended Benchmark Activities for 2007

- i. An Early Recovery "network" needs to be established to ensure early engagement in the recovery process across all Clusters. There also needs to be developed a clear understanding of interlinking and interdependent activities across Cluster and what implications they carry.
- ii. Use Liberia as a case-study on the challenges facing integration of Early Recovery into humanitarian and transitional planning.
- iii. Develop and test a 'phase-in and phase-out' strategy for Clusters with timelines, benchmarks, and impact indicators established with national and county structures that are increasingly capacitated for preparedness and response coordination. This with particular reference to the LRDC.

3.2 PREDICTABLE GAP-FILLING

3.2.1 Added Value to Date

- i. Joint leadership in the Protection and Food Security Clusters, where strong GOL presence and commitment is evident, could be used as a model for identifying and then filling sectoral gaps in other Cluster and Sub-Cluster areas.

3.2.2 Outstanding Issues

- i. Predictable gap-filling will be inconsistent if Clusters do not adapt to meeting needs as they evolve, and if models of what worked in similar crises elsewhere are not captured, learned from and applied. At present insufficient experience has been accumulated to provide for learning across the four pilot countries.
- ii. Mechanisms to address cross-cutting issues, inter-dependence, and interlinking needs to be identified through the IASC CT to ensure that these are systematically addressed as an integrated part of any Cluster response.
- iii. Humanitarian funding is decreasing in Liberia and, as so often in the post-emergency transitional phase, remains uncertain and unpredictable. There is a risk of not being able to capitalise on successes to date and, moreover, a premature departure of NGOs and agencies before Government capacities have been fully established. The Health Cluster, in particular, where an estimated 90% of primary health care provision is supported by the non-governmental sector, is likely to suffer from this.
- iv. The filling of gaps demands knowledge of who is doing what where (and when), knowledge of disaggregated needs to the lowest possible level, and a strategic framework to focus prioritization. The proactive follow-up required to maintain WDDW and other mapping services declined with what many participants saw as the premature departure of the Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC).
- v. Embedding Early Recovery issues into Cluster work plans remains a challenge. There was little knowledge of the Early Recovery "Network" concept.

3.2.3 Recommended Benchmark Activities for 2007

- i. Define end-date and milestones for Cluster disengagement or merger against pre-determined criteria that properly reflect objectives against a clearly defined 'problem statement'.
- ii. Clusters continue to report regularly to the IASC Country Team on their progress against a limited list of prioritized indicators and benchmarks.
- iii. The formal space provided by the IASC CT, needs to be utilised by the Cluster Leads to give regular (quarterly) technical briefings, where inclusion of cross-cutting issues is systematically addressed and challenged by the Country Team collectively.
- iv. The Early Network concept needs to be developed and a clear strategy articulated. Ways of embedding the Early Recovery Cluster in all other Clusters should be identified to ensure that Early Recovery considerations are adequately reflected.
- v. Inclusion of all stakeholder groups, particularly the national NGOs, should be actively promoted by the IASC Country Team and their advice sought in the setting of priorities.
- vi. A checklist of 'standard operating procedures' to be used by Clusters would be helpful. An example would be monitoring of attendance at coordination meetings.
- vii. The present positive attention of Liberia around the world provides an opportunity for the Government and its' humanitarian partners to leverage additional resources by clearly articulating its humanitarian and transitional needs.

3.3 PARTNERSHIPS

3.3.1 Added Value to Date

- i. The Cluster Approach provided a platform for joint assessment of need – albeit using often incompatible methodologies - and planning.

3.3.2 Outstanding Issues

- i. Relationships with identified GOL counterparts at national and local (County) level require strengthening where no Government counterpart has yet been identified.
- ii. Coordination is a management process that requires staff members to be trained in common systems and processes so that the potential for fragmented response is minimised. This will require central and predictable funding through global Cluster Lead mechanisms which eventually should include selected governmental and non-governmental personnel who can be seconded to perform this function.

3.3.3 Recommended Benchmark Activities for 2007

- i. It would be useful if composition of coordination teams, together with standardised operating procedures and Terms of Reference for Cluster coordination functions and stakeholder groups were defined using demonstrated 'best practices' from similar transition settings. Lessons learned from within the country could then be assessed together with the three other Cluster roll-out countries in a workshop dedicated to mutual learning.

3.4 ACCOUNTABILITY

3.4.1 Added Value to Date

- i. Clear leadership within certain Clusters (Health, Protection and Food Security - for example) has been perceived as strengthening planning. This is especially the case where Government has the capacity – as opposed to just the willingness -- to engage.

3.4.2 Outstanding Issues

- i. The 'provider of last resort' stipulation as currently formulated actually acts as a disincentive in many cases as it allows Cluster participants to evade their responsibilities
- ii. There is as yet "no sense of joint responsibility", with responsibility remaining vested solely in a single agency. Consequently, there is no perceived gain to participation. There is limited understanding of the roles each stakeholder group plays and therefore their responsibilities one to the other. These should be articulated within specific Terms of Reference agreed at country level based on 'generic' templates generate by Cluster Leads at the global level.

3.4.3 Recommended Benchmark Activities for 2007

- i. Cluster Leads identify ways to support, including staff, the Government where GOL capacities remain too weak to take on the coordination role.
- ii. Explore the possibility of a global fund be established under the Humanitarian Coordinator for capacitating common services such as (independent) monitoring of Cluster performance, and information management.
- iii. Donors could be requested by the HC to inform Clusters to continue to provide information who they are funding for what, where, and when.

3.5 COORDINATION

3.5.1 Added Value to Date

- i. Some Clusters (Food Security and Health, for example) have engaged successfully with Government counterparts.

3.5.2 Outstanding Issues

- i. Merging and phase-out of Clusters should reflect not just outstanding humanitarian needs, but capacities within Government.
- ii. Application of Cluster 'best practice' through dialogue could be replicated by other Clusters.
- iii. Government counterparts need to be identified for those Clusters where no obvious Line Ministry relationship exists, and dialogue fostered with these individuals.
- iv. There is a lack of reporting on, and therefore low awareness of, progress made by Line Ministries and Clusters. There is therefore a need to strengthen information flows through the Clusters.
- v. Consensus management practices can only be enhanced through full and proactive participation by representatives of all stakeholder groups, including donors.
- vi. Exit strategies need to be mainstreamed into 2007 planning, with due regard to contingency planning for worst-case scenarios and building of capacity in partnership with GOL.
- vii. Information Management requires a common platform to be established within a dedicated GOL structure so that consistent statistical analysis can be undertaken for the benefit of all stakeholders.
- viii. The Cluster Approach is not well developed at local (county) level, where it could be adapted to existing coordination structures with the support of the County Support Teams so that systems better reflect application of appropriate national sectoral policies, for example, without over-burdening their already limited capacities.
- ix. The operational functions of coordination are consistently under-resourced. This limits the efficiency and effectiveness of the Cluster approach as it hinders the creation of an 'enabling environment' with which to foster dialogue and facilitation.

3.5.3 Recommended Benchmark Activities for 2007

- i. IASC CT to articulate what Clusters can do for Government through a collective briefing followed by a series of Cluster-specific briefings, where the Government is not fully participating in the Clusters.
- ii. GOL Cluster counterparts (focal points) to be identified, where the Government is not fully participating in the Clusters.
- iii. GOL to invite WB to participate in Government-chaired Cluster coordination and planning meetings
- iv. National NGOs to be engaged at the IASC Country Team level and their participation strengthened at the Cluster level.

Annex A
IASC – Interim Self-Assessment of Cluster Approach in Liberia Workshop
26 October 2006
Cluster-specific Achievements & Gaps

General	
Achievements	Gaps
Very competent and energetic UN Country Team	Lack of clarity and information
Seeing NGOs as more dynamic partners	Sometimes confusion between Sector meetings & Cluster meetings
Works when Country Team is present	Lack of global support and guidance
	Donor buy-in to the system
	What to do about a non-performing cluster
	No clear definition of roles, need for clarification of donor role
	INGOs are irregularly attending
	Competing egos of U.N. agencies
	No timeline for transfer to GoL
	U.N. agencies misunderstand roles and responsibilities
	Awareness?????
	Poor support for local NGOs
	Inadequate manpower
	Lack of proper coordination in terms of meetings
	Emergency coordination three years after the emergency
	Lack of clarification on cluster approach within UNDAF-How does it fit?
	Integrated Mission: does it risk humanitarian space e.g. IASC chair linked to UNMIL
	Different expectations
	Lack of clarity over mechanism to hold agencies/ leads etc. accountable
	Blurring lines between military and humanitarian
	Lack of clarity of purpose
	Coordination exercise or emerging preparedness or both?
	Cluster for humanitarian response or sector development - unclear
	Cluster is Sector or not?
Health	
Achievements	Gaps
Broad participation from stakeholders	Some INGOs not mapping activities or collaborating
MoHSW part of Cluster (but need for further involvement)	Inconsistent participation and involvement of GoL
Issues and problems identified quickly and addressed	GoL/ Cluster Action on HIV/AIDS clumsy
Coordination at central level	Coordination - not decentralized to Counties
Advocacy and appeals	Time-bomb with incentive issue
G Gap identification and mapping	Mapping not updated (sites, responsibility)
	M.I.S. data push needs progress

Regular Meetings	Meetings at three levels
Active participation	Bottom-up- approach to need assessment/ gap analysis not apply
Relation between GoL, MoHSW, WHO & NGOs improved	More partners need to be encouraged to participate
Improved co-ordination and dialogue.	Appeal not resulting in funding
Strategy document available	Not functioning at County level
Built on existing coordination mechanisms	Role of UNMIL unclear
	Maternal mortality & mobility rate still high

Food Security	
Achievements	Gaps
Bringing all stakeholders together	Some key NGOs are not involved
Developed TOR and policy	Unclear how Cluster fits with other coordination meetings / mechanisms
Platform for identifying priorities	Lack of clarity on roles
Coordination with GOL and stakeholders on CFSNS (first comprehensive data set in the post-crisis situation)	Slow movement on the development of the Food & Nutrition strategy and monitoring mechanism
Effective handling of CERF process in line with GoL's priorities	Needs assessment, analysis and monitoring are fragmented
Good, constructive government leadership with FAO support	In most instances GoL participation is not substantive
GoL participation	Lack of coordination in Counties
Great coordination between stakeholders (if organizations are not participating it is <i>not</i> because opportunity is not there)	Linking to related issues (Nutrition, Early Recovery) unclear
Regular meetings	Few meetings

Protection	
Achievements	Gaps
Regular meetings at the national and County level (10 Counties) including sub-Clusters	Too many areas of protection being addressed
Good participation of INGOs and U.N. agencies	More collaboration with local NGOs in the Country needed
Movement toward decentralization in regions	Loss of confidentiality
Shows progress	Little capacity development for sustainable protection
Assimilated protection core group	Need for capacity building and plan for humanitarian response
Referral system established from 10 County groups to national PCG	No referral or reporting mechanisms to date on the national level Struggling in Counties
485 NRC monitors since January reporting protection cases (818 cases referred Jan-June 2006)	Need for increase of the monitoring system Comprehensive analysis of monitoring still lacking Need for comprehensive data

Child protection and SGBV sub-Cluster chaired by GOL => Starting to build the capacity of GoL (Ministries of Gender & Health)	Little GOL engagement with international community efforts No progress with GoL Need to strengthen the coordination with GoL
UNHCR have secretariat	Coordination between sub-Clusters could be developed more, especially with sub-Cluster on Rule of Law under Early Recovery Cluster
It is an active Cluster	Still need improved coordination among existing information management systems on protection
Sub-groups feed in and join advocacy	Link/relationship between PCG/SGBV and ICN on SEA still unclear, although attempt to clarify made earlier in year
Camp closure assessment conducted by inter-agency task force and protection issues identified in 34 closed camps (May 2006)	HIV/Aids not really mainstreamed in Protection Cluster discussions
GBV sub-cluster POA in the final stage	
Number of successful interventions at the County level (following referral of reports by NRC and others)	
Inter-agency trainings in some Counties	
Support from UNMIL HRPS in Counties where Cluster lead is not located	
Dedicated staff within lead agency	
National work plan on child protection, lead CPAs are being encouraged to revitalize County coordination	
Joint monitoring missions	
Support to sub-Cluster lead on issues of orphanages	

Water/Sanitation	
Achievements	Gaps
Established contingency plan for CI	Many different views of expectations
Mapping facilities	Limited or no focus on current problem in Liberia
CERF funding	Need for higher priority on the role and development of information management products and date base ○ Follow-through ○ Access results
Emergency supplies availability plan established	Who is coordinating? Lack of Government of Liberia involvement No standardized GOL specs wells and latrines The gaps are especially worrisome because the urgent humanitarian needs are great Needs better Cluster leadership Initially only focused on emergency response capacity => Recovery fell through cracks No "last resort" supply system How do you define emergency preparedness in Liberian context? What happens to regular coordination?

Early Recovery	
Achievements	Gaps
Puts the issues on the agenda	Started late
Brings key players together, including the GoL	Definition of Early Recovery in Country context should reflect back on definition of issues dealt with in other clusters
Mapping: "Recycling"/ putting attention back on earlier achievements & data and information products	Weak GoL coordination mechanisms
Network on Legal Assistance now meeting and making link between Protection and Early recovery	Lack of understanding between Early Recovery Cluster and others
	Appealed for CAP funding
	Link with other Clusters unclear
	Early recovery was the RFTF
	Forced to focus only on a few issues leaving out critical issues e.g. governance

Camp Management	
Achievements	Gaps
No specific meeting called "Camp Management " meeting, however, activities went on under ICF and PCG (e.g. camp closure assessment, funding of EFA to address environmental gaps)	
Information sharing management	
Set up a common information mechanism	

Annex 2

FINAL REPORT

IASC Interim Self-Assessment of Implementation of the Cluster Approach in the DRC (24-27 October 2006)

Introduction

In November 2005 an OCHA-led mission visited DRC to discuss possible application of the cluster approach. Following discussions with a wide range of humanitarian partners in Goma, Bukavu and Kinshasa, the mission determined that there were particular gaps in four areas: Protection; Water/Sanitation; Return/Reintegration and Logistics. Based on the mission's findings and recommendations, the Humanitarian Coordinator and members of the Humanitarian Advocacy Group (HAG) in Kinshasa decided to implement the cluster approach, to help fill these gaps and strengthen the overall humanitarian response in the DRC. In recognition of the need to improve the impact of humanitarian action across all sectors, and not just those in which significant gaps were identified, cluster leads were designated for ten clusters and the new arrangements were reflected in the 2006 Humanitarian Action Plan. Implementation of the cluster approach began in January 2006.

An IASC Interim Self-Assessment in the DRC took place from 24 to 27 October 2006, facilitated by Luc Chauvin (UNICEF) and Mark Cutts (OCHA), with assistance from Andrew Wyllie (OCHA Kinshasa). It included a three hour meeting in Kinshasa, attended by 45 people from ten NGOs, seven UN agencies (including all Cluster Leads) and ICRC; and three 90 minute teleconferences with humanitarian partners in the field (South Kivu, with 3 UN agencies, ICRC and OCHA, as well as written comments from an NGO that was unable to participate), Equateur (2 UN agencies, 2 NGOs and OCHA) and Ituri (2 NGOs, one UN agency and OCHA). In each case, participants were sent details about the self assessment in advance with a list of key questions. It also included a meeting with the Humanitarian Coordinator, the Head of the MONUC Civil Affairs Section and the Chief of the Integrated Office. In addition to these discussions, OCHA sent the terms of reference for the self-assessment (including the Framework and Key Questions) by email to all Cluster Leads and to a wide range of humanitarian actors inviting them to send in written comments. The final report takes into account both the comments made during the meetings and comments sent in by email. At the weekly meeting of the Humanitarian Advocacy Group (HAG) chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator in Kinshasa on 27 October, OCHA briefed on the main findings of the self assessment exercise.

Overview of key observations

Concerning the main "gap" areas identified in November 2005 (Protection, Water/Sanitation, Return/Reintegration and Logistics), the perception amongst humanitarian partners in the DRC is that there has been considerable progress in filling gaps in at least two of these areas. In the case of Protection, a number of new Protection Officers have been deployed, leading to better monitoring, advocacy and follow-up on protection-related issues. In a number of cases in the last few months, MONUC troops have been deployed to help protect civilians as a direct result of the advocacy efforts of the Protection cluster. In the case of Water/Sanitation, it may be too early to assess the impact of new programmes, but it is clear that there is now much greater capacity amongst humanitarian actors working in this sector. Investment in humanitarian activities in this sector has grown exponentially, from US\$ 1 million in 2005 to US\$ 13 million in 2006. For 2007, the draft Humanitarian Action Plan includes US\$ 99 million for Water/Sanitation, representing about 15% of the total humanitarian appeal. In terms of humanitarian response capacity, water/sanitation is no longer the "gap" area that it was in DRC one year ago.

In terms of partnership and coordination amongst humanitarian partners, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed during the self-assessment felt that this had improved since the introduction of the cluster approach. There were, however, serious concerns in four main areas: (1) that although the Pooled Fund has been used to strengthen humanitarian response in “gap” areas, the use of clusters for allocating resources from the Pooled Fund and the new CERF is leading to a situation where the “honest broker” role of the cluster lead may be compromised and the clusters themselves are coming to be perceived largely as tools of these funding mechanisms rather than the other way around; (2) that some Cluster Leads are perceived to be too authoritarian and seen to be abusing their positions to promote their own agencies at the expense of NGOs, particularly when it comes to allocation of funds; (3) that participation in clusters has come to mean participating in numerous cluster meetings at both national and local levels, placing excessive demands on some organizations that have little capacity to attend all of these; and (4) that there is a recognized need to ensure appropriate (and in some cases stronger) linkages between clusters and Government/local authorities.

Observations and recommendations by thematic area

Predictable leadership and gap-filling

Overall, the decision to designate cluster leads has greatly enhanced the predictability of leadership and gap-filling in the 10 sectors/areas of activity. There is now far greater attention to the four areas identified in November 2005 as critical “gap” areas: Protection, Water/Sanitation, Return/Reintegration and Logistics. In terms of protection, there is now better coordination, advocacy and response (though still poor linkages in some places between the Protection Cluster and sub-clusters such as for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence); in terms of Water and Sanitation, there is now much more capacity than before, stronger leadership and more activities to address urgent needs; in terms of return/reintegration, many of the activities in the Action Plan for 2007 (e.g. for Wat/San) are focused on areas of return, which is an improvement over previous action plans, where there was little analysis of main areas of return; and in the case of logistics, some felt that there has also been some progress, while others (notably JLC staff) felt that the cluster approach had not led to any improvement.

On the positive side, the basic concepts underpinning the cluster approach are relatively well understood by cluster lead agencies in Kinshasa: all lead agencies have received and disseminated internally the guidance note (including to field staff); the draft TORs for country-level cluster lead have been used and adapted; individuals have been appointed as national and provincial cluster focal points for all clusters and their contact information communicated to partners; OCHA has created a web-based humanitarian information exchange platform (<http://www.rdc-humanitaire.net/>) which supports *inter alia* the dissemination of information on cluster activities (including names and contact details of cluster leads). In the field, the implementation of the cluster approach has enabled the creation of sector specific coordination mechanisms that did not formally exist beforehand (e.g. for protection, WASH, logistics and education in South Kivu).

In spite of these positive developments, however, some outstanding issues remain to be addressed. About half of the 45 participants in the Kinshasa self-assessment workshop had not read the guidance note, thus underlying the need for greater dissemination of information on clusters especially to NGO partners; co-leadership of clusters in the field is not always well understood and one person said it “tends to lead to confusion and de-responsibilization”; similarly, the “supportive role” of a partner to a field cluster lead is often not well defined and it was felt that this sometimes creates confusion in the management of the cluster; there were complaints of too many meetings, some of which do not seem to be necessary (for example, in one place a dynamic functioning joint food security/nutrition coordination meeting was replaced by two separate meetings when the food security and nutrition clusters were

formed); the separation of functions of cluster focal point (to ensure the coordination of cluster participants) with that of its own agency programme implementation requirements is also not always made; some cluster lead are perceived to be “authoritarian” rather than “facilitators”; the use of clusters to allocate resources from the Pooled Fund has meant in the words of one cluster lead representative in the field that what started as a “dynamic coordination mechanism progressively turned into a forum to discuss funding needs”. This is recognized to be a problem and at the HAG meeting on 27 October the Humanitarian Coordinator stressed that “the Pooled Fund should be used to support the clusters and not the other way round”.

Recommendations:

- *The revised Guidance Note should be translated into French and should be widely disseminated. All IASC partners should help to ensure that their staff are familiar with the new approach.*
- *To ensure effective implementation of the new approach, capacity-building programmes should be developed, particularly for Cluster Leads. In particular, Cluster Leads should receive training/guidance as soon as possible on the new approach, and on how to effectively carry out the functions listed in the Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads.*

Partnership and coordination

Of the 45 participants at the self-assessment meeting on 25 October, the overwhelming majority felt that the introduction of the cluster approach has overall contributed to improving the level of partnership amongst humanitarian actors.

In spite of this, however, a number of problems were identified. The cluster approach requires that individuals assuming the role of cluster lead possess not only technical skills relevant to their sector but also have essential facilitation and people skills. Some Cluster Leads are perceived to be too “authoritarian” and to look at issues too much through the prism of their own agencies’ priorities, and this has not helped to create a sense of joint ownership of the cluster approach. Not all staff understand the cluster approach in the same way and this has not helped. As one person put it, “the lack of clear guidance from Kinshasa leads to confusion and to (local) cluster leads understanding the approach differently and thus explaining it to partners in varying ways.” Also, some felt that there is a need to ensure better linkages between clusters and Government/local authorities in some places. The fact that the clusters were being used for allocating money from the Pooled Fund (most of which has gone so far to UN agencies, or been channelled through them) has not helped to build confidence amongst NGOs that clusters are there for everyone’s benefit. Also, some places (particularly in the western Provinces) still work through “sectoral commissions” rather than clusters, and there is still no clear agreement on the role of clusters in these areas.

Recommendations:

- *Concerning awareness of the cluster approach and training/guidance, see recommendations above.*
- *Concerning cluster meetings, these should be rationalized, with primacy being given to the Provincial CPIA meetings and the HAG meeting at the Kinshasa level. Cluster Leads should also consider combining some cluster meetings, rather than having separate meetings for all clusters at every level.*
- *Concerning the Pooled Fund, to alleviate the burden on clusters a rolling application process should be developed based on specific criteria for vetting projects.*
- *Concerning the “sectoral commissions” that still exist in some parts of the country, the Humanitarian Coordinator – with OCHA support – should ensure that there are appropriate coordination arrangements for humanitarian activities throughout the country. In some cases, this may call for differentiated approaches in particular*

geographical areas, depending on the circumstances and the capacities of local authorities, development actors and other stakeholders.

Accountability

It was felt that there was an improvement in the way that some UN agencies, as cluster leads, are now being held accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator. However, the lack of clear guidance from the IASC until now on the specific responsibilities of Cluster Leads at the country level, and the lack of training/guidance for cluster leads so far, has meant that it has been hard to hold them accountable in a systematic way. Also, it was felt that there should be more emphasis on the accountability of humanitarian organizations to vulnerable populations and recipients of assistance/services.

Recommendations:

- *Cluster Leads should be familiarized with the new Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads, as contained in the revised Guidance Note. They should receive proper training/guidance in how to exercise the responsibilities listed in the terms of reference, and they should then be held systematically accountable for carrying these out.*

Strategic planning

It was generally felt that the cluster approach has helped to improve strategic planning in the DRC. Inputs for the 2007 Action Plan are considered to be a great improvement over the inputs received for the 2006 Action Plan. The draft 2007 Action Plan is considered to have better benchmarks and indicators than the 2006 Action Plan, though these need to be further developed. Overall, however, it was felt that more work needs to be done to ensure better needs assessment, monitoring, and reporting, if strategic planning is to be further improved. Another major weakness was seen to be the lack of a clear and accessible database containing information on humanitarian needs and actions in the DRC. In particular, some felt that OCHA is not doing enough to improve overall information analysis and sharing of information - a point with which the OCHA Office in the DRC agrees and is seeking to address.

Recommendations:

- *OCHA should develop, in consultation with Cluster Leads and all humanitarian partners in the DRC, a clear strategy to improve overall information management in the country.*
- *OCHA should work with Cluster Leads and all humanitarian partners in the DRC to develop better benchmarks and indicators to measure the impact of humanitarian programmes in general, and the impact of individual clusters.*