THE PARTICIPATION OF NGOs IN CLUSTER CO-LEADERSHIP AT COUNTRY LEVEL: A REVIEW OF EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

The practice of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) participating in the leadership and management of country level clusters is occurring more frequently in recent years. In several situations, cluster leads are approaching NGOs to take on roles in the cluster, such as co-leadership. This review draws on the experiences of NGOs in cluster leadership and management in the four focus countries of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe. These case studies highlight both the enabling and inhibiting factors that contribute to the effective sharing of responsibilities between the UN and NGOs for optimal cluster performance. This paper intends to contribute to a better definition of the potential role of NGOs, as well as highlighting good practice if and when cluster stakeholders decide that there is a role for NGOs in cluster coordination leadership.

A brief summary of lessons learned from experience in the four countries is followed by some possible ways forward. An Annex provides further details from each of the four country experiences.

Background

In 2005, as a result of the lack of predictable leadership and clear gaps in capacity during emergencies, the cluster approach was adopted to coordinate the humanitarian response to emergencies in developing countries. Subsequently a sub-set of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) – UN agencies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – identified global lead agencies in nine sectors. These lead agency roles were primarily assumed by the UN agencies, with IOM as the lead for the camp management cluster and IFRC as the convener of the emergency shelter cluster, both in rapid on-set disasters.

The November 2006 *IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response* outlines the aim and scope of the cluster approach and defines the responsibilities of the clusters for policy and standard-setting, building response capacity and operational support. The Guidance Note was complemented by the Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Coordinators at the Country Level[1]. Global cluster leads are accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) for ensuring technical capacity and system-wide preparedness. While at the country level, Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs) are accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator. Intended to contribute to the predictability, coordination and accountability of humanitarian action, the cluster approach is dependent on strong leadership, both at the global and national level.

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[1] See Terms of Reference for Generic Sector/Cluster Leads at Country Level www.humanitarianreform.org

Simultaneously, the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) was established in 2006, bringing together the heads of 40 agencies – UN/inter-governmental organisations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and NGOs. The GHP, through the Principles of Partnership (PoP), aims to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action by maximising complementarities of different humanitarian stakeholders based on their different mandates and mission statements, and to establish partnerships based on principles of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. These principles have, subsequently, been promoted throughout the clusters and other aspects of humanitarian reform.[2]

In 2007, the first phase of the Cluster Evaluation[3] found that NGO participation in the clusters was weak, particularly as far as national NGOs were concerned.[4] In response to the recommendations in the evaluation, the IASC in the Management Response Matrix (MRM) proposed that NGOs should improve their definition of the parameters of their engagement in the clusters, including whether they could take on co-leadership roles at either the global or country level.[5] Since then, NGO co-leadership roles within the clusters have expanded considerably.

At a global level, several international NGOs have played a significant role within global clusters. For example, Save the Children is the only global NGO co-lead, which includes sharing the responsibility as Provider of Last Resort (POLR)[6]. Several other NGOs have seconded staff to assist in the establishment of global clusters or have offered general technical advice. For national level deployment, some international NGOs have developed a rapid response deployment capacity to support country and emergency-specific cluster performance.

At the country level, international NGOs, and national NGOs to a much lesser extent, are actively engaged in cluster leadership and management, including co-leading, co-chairing, co-coordinating, co-convening, co-facilitating clusters, and/or participating in the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) of a cluster, where these exist.[7] Direct participation in the management of clusters has evolved differently in each case and has been largely dependent on a number of factors, including: the commitment of the Humanitarian Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and individual cluster leads to encourage NGOs to assume a co-leadership role; the capacity and willingness of NGOs to assume the role; and availability of funding for the role.

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[2] See www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org.

[3] Stoddard et al, (2007) Cluster Apporach Evaluation

[4] This finding was echoed two years later in the research for the four-country mapping studies commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, which published a *Synthesis Report: Review of Engagement of the NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process*, October 2009 see www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.

[5] IASC 2007, Management Response Matrix (Annex 1 in Stoddard et al. *Cluster Approach Evaluation*. 2007. Excerpt from the Management Response Matrix: "*The NGO Consortia participating as standing invitees in the IASC to request their members to address the following recommendation: Set and clearly communicate parameters for the level of engagement (time and resources) that can be expected in various clusters, including willingness and ability to take on a leading role at the global or country level, and to second staff as cluster coordinators when called upon.*"

[6] See IASC Operational Guidance on the Concept of "Provider of Last Resort" www.humanitarianreform.org

[7] The SAGs are not a regular or widespread practice in cluster management.

Given the *ad hoc* nature of both the motives and enabling conditions for NGO co-leadership, the results of co-leadership have also been mixed.

Only rarely have national NGOs been called upon to assist in cluster leadership and management (e.g. the Food and Agriculture, Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Clusters in Afghanistan. Where national NGOs have been appointed as deputy leads or co-chairs it has often been with good results

Before providing some detail about the country level experience of NGOs in cluster leadership and management, it may be helpful to explore the terms used to describe leadership in clusters:

Cluster management terminology at global and country level

In July 2009, the IASC Working Group agreed the following definitions:
1. Global Cluster Lead Agency: The agency/organisation at global level that has been designated by the IASC as cluster lead agency for a particular sector/cross-cutting issue.
2. Global Cluster Coordinator: The person who has been designated as global cluster coordinator by the Global Cluster Lead Agency. This person is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and facilitation of the work of a global cluster.
3. Cluster Lead Agency (country level): The agency or organisation that has been designated by the Resident and/or Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) as cluster lead agency at the country level, following consultations with the Humanitarian Country Team. (A cluster lead agency at the country level is not necessarily the same agency/organisation as the Global Cluster Lead Agency.)
4. Cluster Coordinator (country level): The person who has been designated as cluster coordinator by the cluster lead agency at the country level. This person is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and facilitation of the work of the cluster.[8]

Currently there is no agreed definition or terminology for the co-leadership or co-management of clusters at the country level. The practice has been variously referred to as co-chair (Afghanistan), co-lead (Afghanistan), deputy lead (Afghanistan), co-facilitator (DRC) or co-convener. Equally important, if not more important, than the title of the position is a mutually agreed Terms of Reference (ToR) for the NGO. This is one lesson learned from the review presented in this paper.

As outlined above, the term 'lead' describes the agency while the term 'coordinator' describes the agent or person designated by the agency. This paper, in line with the globally agreed definitions, likewise uses the generic terms of 'co-lead' when referring to the agency and 'co-coordinator' when referring to the person employed. However, for the detailed case studies in the Annex, the original terms used in each country are maintained.

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[8] Joint letter from Cluster Lead Agencies to their Directors/Representatives at Country Level signed by ten global cluster lead agencies 20 October, 2009.

Benefits of NGO cluster co-leadership

- Improved lesson learning and responsive management, e.g. improving on cluster procedures (DRC).
- Improved participation by NGOs due to cluster strategic priorities and structures perceived to be better suited to NGO needs and capacities (DRC).
- Where government participates in clusters, and sometimes in the leadership and management, the involvement of an NGO increases the human resources available to build the capacity of government counterparts to participate effectively. This is also true at the sub-national level (Ethiopia).
- Where the UN cannot immediately assume its cluster responsibility due to various constraints, NGOs (particularly those with cluster experience) can 'fill the gap' (Zimbabwe).
- Improved transparency and decision making based on needs in the allocation of pooled funding (CHF, CERF, etc.)[9] (DRC).

Enabling factors

- There is more often an NGO co-lead when the role is prioritised by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), OCHA or cluster lead agency (Afghanistan, DRC).
- Pooled funding mechanisms that explicitly allocate funding for NGO co-leads can drive the development of ToRs, recruitment and accountability for the agreed responsibilities of a co-lead (DRC).
- ToRs are a good start, but they are not enough (DRC). Other than the factors already mentioned here, NGOs in DRC consulted prior to this review made further suggestions, which included the regular review of the performance of cluster management with the HC, and considering the initiation of meetings for NGOs and the HC only, to encourage frank discussion.
- NGOs that have been able to take the time to consider the implications of the responsibility sufficiently, informed by knowledge of the parameters of the role, have provided sufficient training to relevant staff, both international and national, and have taken time to factor this training into internal planning processes. They are likely to provide effective cluster co-coordinators.
- The NGO itself prioritises the work of the NGO co-coordinator and alleviates the co-coordinator of his/her agency-specific responsibilities so that the work of the agency and the cluster does not suffer (DRC, Zimbabwe).

In addition to the issues mentioned above, national NGO participation was identified as a priority in the 2007 Cluster Evaluation; in particular to "*work with recipient states*", "*make capacity building a focus of clusters' operations in chronic and recurrent emergency countries*", and

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[9] Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF), Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)

facilitate "*transition/closeout*" of clusters.[10] However, evidence from this review does not show that the participation of national NGOs, particularly in cluster co-leadership, has been prioritised.

Factors inhibiting NGO cluster co-leadership

- Although national NGO counterparts have various strengths, many national NGOs are disadvantaged by their lack of familiarity and/or experience with the cluster approach. Without awareness raising or training, national NGOs have found it difficult to have a significant impact, particularly as co-leads, on cluster performance (Afghanistan).
- Sometimes there is confusion regarding the role of NGO co-leads when there is strong government leadership, either in sectoral task forces or the clusters themselves. It is helpful when the UN acts as a facilitator, explaining the value-added role of the NGO. This results in greater appreciation, collaboration and ultimately partnership between government, UN agencies and NGOs (Ethiopia).
- As has been the case in Afghanistan, DRC and Zimbabwe, NGOs have to carefully consider their own capacity, availability of funding or the risk of high staff turnover when assuming co-leadership or even a co-facilitation role.
- UN cluster coordinators should normally be dedicated full time to cluster work, although in reality this often does not happen. Depending on the ToR, availability of funding and skilled staff, the NGO lead agency must correspondingly allow for the NGO co-coordinator to contribute as agreed. However, this has resource implications that can impact on direct delivery of programmes.
- Without funding or significant staff numbers (the two are often related), only a larger perhaps international NGO will be able to volunteer for the co-leadership role (Zimbabwe). Means and ways to facilitate local NGOs to participate must be actively pursued.

How NGOs are appointed as co-leads

NGOs have become cluster co-leads through a variety of processes. Some have been appointed through a consultative process within a cluster (DRC); others have nominated themselves (Zimbabwe); while others have been nominated by the UN cluster lead agency (Zimbabwe) or by the Humanitarian Coordinator (DRC). The results have been varied. Learning from less positive experiences, when the decision is taken to have NGOs participate in cluster management without the wide consultation of stakeholders, the benefits may be compromised (Zimbabwe).

Similarly, while the decision to appoint an NGO co-lead may be usefully discussed with the IASC or Humanitarian Country Team, the process must include even wider consultation. This should involve agencies that do not regularly attend the IASC or Heads of Agency meetings and local NGOs, to ensure willing support and participation of NGOs in co-management (Zimbabwe).

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[10]See Footnote 2 above.

Save the Children is the sole agency that has a global agreement with a UN agency – in this case, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) – to be co-lead. Save the Children is not only co-lead of the Global Education Cluster, but it also leads a country level education cluster if it has a pre-existing presence in the affected country and the capacity to take on the role (Afghanistan, DRC, Zimbabwe).

Defining the role and responsibility of NGOs as co-leads

It is rare for NGOs to have either a ToR or a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) defining their roles and responsibilities as co-leads (Afghanistan, Zimbabwe). If these are missing, there can be confusion regarding the value-added role of NGOs as co-leads. Moreover, this could lead to the possibility of NGOs not assuming a more strategic co-leadership role, including agenda setting (Afghanistan). This fact is not unique to UN-NGO co-leadership but also to UN-UN co-leadership, for example, the experience of the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) co-leading a combined food security and agricultural cluster (Afghanistan).

ToRs are helpful for clarifying expectations and requirements of the job, including what the co-lead agency will not do, recruiting the right person, ensuring broader cluster participation and agreement on the role of the co-lead. This is particularly true when the ToRs are decided by the cluster participants or generic ToRs are amended to reflect specific cluster needs (DRC).

Elements of ToRs have included responsibility for joint and transparent decision making (DRC) and strategic oversight of the work of the cluster (DRC). Other noted benefits that can be integrated into the ToR include outreach and soliciting feedback from NGO members to understand their needs and constraints, particularly local NGOs (Afghanistan), and capacity building of local NGO and government counterparts (Ethiopia).

Co-leadership and management is more likely to succeed when the coordinator appointed by the UN (or IOM or IFRC) and the NGO co-coordinator have complementary skills and the ToRs reflect a similar division of responsibilities. This division contributes to a sense of equality and improved transparency between the two parties. One example of this is in Afghanistan, where the WASH Cluster is perceived to be highly effective by cluster stakeholders. The UN counterpart has extensive experience with the UN, including knowledge of the history of the WASH Cluster in Afghanistan, and familiarity with the needs of various stakeholders, while the NGO counterpart has the necessary technical expertise. Observers note the equal commitment of time and responsibility of both.

Many NGO co-leads are not ready or able to take on the responsibility of Provider of Last Resort (POLR), particularly in the case where leadership is shared with a local NGO or smaller international NGO with limited resources. However, these same NGOs have often undertaken advocacy on behalf of the cluster to try and mobilise sufficient resources. In some cases, particularly when an NGO assumes a formal co-leadership role at the global level, a formal MoU

is signed. Such is the case of Save the Children and UNICEF, who have officially agreed to co-lead the Global Education Cluster, including sharing the responsibility of POLR (see below).

Case study: Save the Children and the global and national education cluster

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The Global Education Cluster has developed country level guidance on education cluster establishment and leadership. This provides guidance to all actors involved in the education cluster leadership, including UNICEF and Save the Children staff. The note covers accountabilities and reporting responsibilities, as well as decision making and staffing. The note urges that a country level leadership arrangement should be set out prior to an emergency in an MoU between the agencies involved. This should cover, among other things: the duration of agreement; governance structures; reporting lines; commitments on resource mobilisation; representation on Humanitarian Country Team (HCT); dual responsibility of Cluster Lead Agencies to represent the interests of both their agency and the Education Cluster and for cluster coordinators to act as neutral representatives of the cluster rather than agency representatives; commitments to joint decision making; information sharing and agreement around POLR.[11]

UNICEF and Save the Children have recently begun an evaluation of the education cluster co-leadership arrangement, with the following objective:
(1) to suggest what, if any, changes should be made to the co-leadership arrangement in order to enhance its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency; and
(2) to serve as one input to inform the timing and parameters of the up-coming evaluation of the Global Education Cluster itself.

In the first case, the main objective is to uncover aspects of the cluster co-leadership arrangement that are working well and those that are working less well, in order to enable the cluster co-lead agencies to take corrective action and to inform relevant aspects of the later Education Cluster evaluation. This includes determining what indicators might be used for the effective evaluation of the performance of the cluster in general and the performance of the co-leads in particular.[12]

What makes a good NGO co-lead or co-coordinator

Effective co-coordination of clusters depends on the competency of the personnel involved. A competent person is more likely to be identified where the specific requirements of the position are well defined (MoU or ToR) (DRC). In the case of DRC and Afghanistan, these requirements included technical knowledge, active participation in the cluster and broad knowledge of the country.

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[11] Global Education Cluster Country level guidance on education cluster establishment and leadership.
[12] See: http://www.unicef.org/about/employ/index_52352.html.

Possible ways forward

The determination of priority sectors and sector/cluster lead arrangements are principally determined at country level through a consultative process steered by the Humanitarian Coordinator and Country Team, including the agency best placed to assume the lead role. The decision to have an NGO co-lead, the objectives of doing so, the ToR and the selection process of the NGO (national or international) and its appointed staff are all factors that need to be discussed.

Given experience in the four focus countries reviewed, the following issues should be considered when defining the ToR as a shared decision based on country and emergency specific factors:

- How an NGO co-lead would contribute to improving results for crisis affected communities.
- How an NGO co-lead would enhance the functioning of the cluster and work with the cluster lead to build a more effective cluster.
- The role of the NGO *vis-à-vis* national government, particularly when the government has a strong role in leading the response.
- Needs and capacity in-country of international or national NGOs or other civil society organisations, both as stakeholders in the cluster and as potential coordinators.
- Needs for co-leadership roles at provincial or non-capital level, particularly in situations where the cluster lead agency has no presence or is unable to provide staff.

If the NGO cluster co-leadership role is to become standard practice then generic MoUs that define the relationship between two agencies at the country level could usefully be drawn up by global cluster leads. These would then be adapted to fit specific country circumstances. For countries at risk of recurrent rapid onset emergencies, pre-agreed MoUs for NGOs to play a cluster co-leadership role might be particularly useful.

As the process varies widely for choosing NGO co-leads, stakeholders will benefit from procedures for the election or nomination of cluster NGO co-leads being clarified, and possibly standardised across countries and across clusters.

Generic considerations when choosing NGO co-leads

- Objectives of having an NGO co-lead and their ToRs.
- Know-how of staff within the nominated co-lead agency to lead a cluster, which implies NGO staff receive adequate training, have support systems from the global cluster and supportive line management to enable the role to be carried out effectively.
- Willingness of nominated co-lead agency and appointed coordinator to represent the needs and interests of the cluster as a whole and not just their own agency, which means acting in a neutral and transparent manner.
- The availability of funding to finance the NGO co-lead or offset costs to replace the staff member in the host agency.

Stakeholders may benefit from procedures for the election or nomination of cluster NGO co-leads being clarified and possibly standardised across countries and across clusters.

As observed, the title given to the NGO and its appointed representative varies from country to country. For example, where responsibility and accountability (including being the POLR, as defined in the MoU between the two agencies) is equally shared between the UN and NGO, the term co-lead is often used (in line with global definitions). Note, however, that when NGO counterparts have not taken on the responsibility of POLR, they have nonetheless undertaken advocacy on behalf of the cluster to try and mobilise sufficient and appropriate allocation of resources given common needs assessments, and a transparent analysis of available resources and gaps.

If the decision to have an NGO co-lead is participatory and transparent, the role and responsibilities are clear, and the agency delegated the responsibility is determined to be capable, then it is the responsibility of the NGO in question to accept the position. This should only be taken on if they have given due consideration to the commitment, including an assessment of their own capacity.

Based on a review of the experience of co-facilitators in the DRC made in early 2009,[13] the NGO co-facilitators made the following additional recommendations:

- Continue the role of NGO co-leadership. Decision makers need to communicate this to stakeholders, including government, donors and other cluster members.
- Continue documenting learning to understand the factors conducive to effective cluster performance, including the role of the co-lead. Share these lessons with stakeholders including decision makers.
- Where appropriate, consider co-leads at sub-regional level.
- Regularly review the performance of cluster management with the HC and consider NGO-HC only meetings to encourage frank discussion.
- Regularly review the performance of the NGO co-lead, including considering a 'term limit' to allow for other NGOs to participate, as well as the incumbent NGO to step down.

Final reflections

Whilst this review highlights experience in four countries, NGO participation in the leadership and management of clusters is much broader than the activities in these four countries. The experience of these four countries does not necessarily provide insight into all of the outstanding questions regarding the NGO role. In the course of undertaking this limited review, based on the work of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project staff in the four project focus countries, it is clear that there has been little systematic work done in this regard in other countries, either internally by the

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[13] *Co-facilitation selon les co-facilitateurs,* paper by Nick Martlew, Humanitarian Reform Advisor, January 2009. The review was based on 11 responses out of the 20 co-leads contacted.

international NGOs that have undertaken cluster co-leadership roles or by the UN. It is hoped that the nearly completed Cluster Evaluation 2009, drawing on cluster performance in six case study countries[14] where NGOs have assumed various responsibilities in cluster management, will contribute further understanding of the conducive factors for the effective functioning of clusters and potentially the value-added role of NGOs.

Further examination of experience and lessons learned needs to be carried out in the following areas:

1. **The Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding:** a review of various ToRs and MoU used to define the relationship between lead and co-lead agency and the responsibilities of NGOs in cluster management needs to be undertaken and those responsibilities consistently found can be used to inform generic MoUs and ToRs. Aspects or these arrangements that vary from country to country can be highlighted. Finalised TORs and MoUs should be decided by the cluster stakeholders.

2. **Impact of NGO involvement in leadership and management of clusters:** Some indications of impact have been mentioned under the benefits described in the DRC. However, there may be other benefits, including to what extent having an NGO involved does in fact result in a longer term capacity for the country (in the case of a national NGO or government counterpart); or in more effective engagement of NGOs, particularly national civil society; and most importantly in improving results for affected communities.

3. **Alternative roles for NGOs:** A more recent development is the Strategic Advisory Group or SAG, which is not detailed in this review. The SAG, cluster steering groups or oversight committees normally consist of a small number of cluster members that meet on a regular basis to review and support the work of the lead agency and identify how to fill any gaps in leadership functions as they arise. NGOs may be appointed, self-selected or elected into a small group that provides strategic direction to the cluster coordinator. The SAG can include national and international NGOs and government. The term of the members of the SAG can be perpetual to the life of the cluster or fixed, wherein members can either chose to 'step down' or new members can be proposed.

4. **Alternative support for improved cluster performance:** Before moving towards a more widespread adoption of the NGO cluster co-leadership role, it would be important to undertake a detailed examination of whether other forms of support and oversight of cluster lead roles might be more appropriate, particularly considering the limited resources of NGOs, as well as providing a more cost-effective means of using global funds for humanitarian action. Mechanisms such as SAGs, cluster steering groups or oversight committees would not relieve the work burden of the cluster lead. However, they could contribute a strong field perspective and ensure transparency in decision making, as well as

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[14] Chad, DRC, Gaza, Haiti, Myanmar and Uganda.

making sure that partnership ways of working are adhered to. They could also potentially enhance accountability of the cluster lead agency to cluster participants. The adoption of these types of mechanisms would also enable NGOs to maintain their independence from the UN. This is particularly important to NGOs, especially in situations of conflict with UN Integrated Missions, where assuming cluster co-leadership roles could be perceived by some actors as putting NGOs into too close an alliance with the UN.

Annex: Review of the NGO co-lead experiences in the four focus countries of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project[15]

Afghanistan

Eight (8) clusters were operational in Afghanistan as of October 2009. Six of these had what are termed NGO "deputy leads" and one had an NGO co-chair:

- Education: lead is UNICEF; the deputy lead is Save the Children US.
- Emergency Shelter: lead is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the deputy lead is CARE.
- Food Security and Agriculture: co-leads are WFP and FAO; Afghanaid is co-chair.
- Health: lead is the World Health Organization (WHO); the deputy lead is IbnSina, an Afghan national NGO.
- Protection: lead is UNHCR; the deputy leads are Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Human Rights Unit.
- WASH: lead is UNICEF; the deputy lead is Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR).

The experience of these NGOs, either as deputy leads or co-chairs, varies across clusters:

- **Education**: Consistent with the global MoU on co-leadership of the Education Cluster, UNICEF and Save the Children US 'co-lead' the Afghanistan Education Cluster. The leadership on the UNICEF side has been relatively consistent. Save the Children (SC-US) was initially reluctant to take on a cluster co-lead role, partly due to a lack of capacity or funding, but also recognising the risk and disadvantages of SC-US high staff turnover. In September 2009, a full-time UNICEF cluster coordinator arrived to fill the post for six months, with dedicated funding for the position and a ToR that had been previously discussed with the entire cluster. The cluster does not yet have a work plan, although it had agreed revised ToRs for the cluster, including the priorities of improving the participation of the Ministry of Education (MoE), coordination and communication in the field and identifying and sharing best practices in education in emergencies. There has been a relatively good NGO engagement in the cluster and understanding of the purpose of the cluster and how it is supposed to function. However, there is no national NGO participation in the cluster and no outreach has been done to include national NGOs.
- The **Emergency Shelter** deputy-lead CARE has no ToR for the role and assumed responsibility for this work without a clear definition of what was expected. As a result, the agency has not assumed a clear co-lead role and its participation in the cluster has mainly been limited to participation in meetings, in much the same way as other cluster members.
- **Food Security and Agriculture:** This is the largest cluster in Afghanistan in terms of funding and needs. It has an email membership of 65, average attendance of 30 and the

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[15] This section is based on information provided by the HROs in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and DRC, and on the mapping study in Zimbabwe.

2009 overall Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) requirement of close to $355 million. The cluster is co-led by WFP and FAO, although there is no ToR or MoU to determine the division of labour between the two co-leads. Initially it was difficult to identify an NGO deputy. While Afghanaid volunteered for this role early in 2009, a lack of clarity regarding the responsibilities of the two co-leads has led to limited NGO influence in such issues as agenda setting. Relations between NGOs and UN lead agencies within this cluster have not always been easy, and work remains to be done to improve levels of trust between actors.

- The **Health Cluster** has managed to obtain funding for its coordination role, with three full-time positions funded by the Norwegian government including an NGO co-lead**.** No MoU/ToR has been developed for the role and neither has a job profile been devised for the NGO staff member in question. Responsibilities are shared in an *ad hoc* manner and meetings are attended by either of the three, depending on who is in country, and sometimes all of them. The national NGO co-lead has not had any training either on clusters in general nor on the co-lead role. The cluster has not been able to conduct any national NGO outreach and the co-lead is working more as a WHO staff member, rather than representing the wider NGO partnership.

- Currently the cluster leadership in **Protection** consists of a cluster coordinator provided by UNHCR and funded by the Norwegian government, and two deputies: NRC as the NGO representative and UNAMA Human Rights. No funding is provided for the deputy positions. There is also an International Rescue Committee (IRC)-funded cluster secretary based in the UNHCR office who has played a pivotal role in ensuring the effective functioning of the cluster. The management staff of the cluster is inclusive and ambitious in relation to improving the function of the cluster and the capacity of its members. However, the cluster secretary role is challenged by the incumbent successfully maintaining the required neutrality and operational responsibilities within UNHCR.

- **WASH**: This cluster benefits from a committed leadership, lead by UNICEF with DAACAR as deputy NGO lead. There is no dedicated funding for the cluster lead or for the deputy.

There is general agreement among the NGOs consulted in Afghanistan that the NGO deputy role is important for the effective functioning of the clusters. However, since no cluster has developed a ToR for the deputy, and the roles and responsibilities of the deputies differ from cluster to cluster, no clear conclusions can be drawn on what the NGOs actually contribute.

Drawing on the example of the WASH Cluster in Afghanistan, which stands out from the other clusters as a highly effective cluster, it can be said that – where it works well – there is a strong sense of equality and transparency between the chair and the deputy. This is made possible by the role played by the UNICEF cluster coordinator in particular. He is an Afghan national who has been working with UNICEF for 15 years and knows all the WASH actors working in Afghanistan and the historic aspect of WASH coordination mechanisms. Working with him is the equally dedicated DAACAR representative who has great technical knowledge. Together they both invest a great deal of time and energy into their cluster coordination roles. The impact of the WASH Cluster's work on communities in general is not yet clearly measurable, although the cluster is

currently putting in place a number of procedures that should contribute towards being able to measure this.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In early 2008, the Humanitarian Coordinator in DRC instituted a system of NGO cluster co-facilitators as part of the Pooled Fund allocation process. Formal parameters for the ToRs were agreed for the co-facilitation role and were subsequently approved by the Heads of Mission and cluster lead agencies in Kinshasa (although this delineation of roles was agreed after most of the cluster co-facilitators had been identified). Thereafter it was up to the decision-making process within the clusters (at national and provincial level) to decide whether there was a need for a co-facilitator and, if accepted, to appoint a qualified candidate who fulfilled the ToR. The terms of reference included two primary functions: responsibility for joint and transparent decision making and strategic oversight of the work of the cluster. POLR and other leadership functions were to remain with the cluster lead agency and not to be shared with the co-facilitators.

Each cluster defined the process they would use for the selection of the cluster co-facilitator and developed a more detailed ToR for the role. In practice, co-facilitators were selected for their technical knowledge, active participation in the cluster and broad knowledge of the country. The performance of incumbents varied across clusters and expectations for the role were not consistent, in spite of ToRs. Cluster leads in some cases expected little input from the NGO co-facilitator, while in contrast other NGO co-facilitators virtually ran the cluster.

There were a number of challenges facing the co-facilitators in assuming their role. First, since the system was introduced quickly, with a pressure felt by some NGOs to take this role up, there was effectively little time to make institutional adjustments, particularly in recruiting extra staff. As a result, sometimes the agency's own work suffered. Furthermore, the fact that the cluster leads had funding for their coordination lead role, whereas the co-facilitators did not, acted as a barrier towards developing a sense of true partnership. This was compounded by the fact that some NGO co-coordinators simply could not dedicate sufficient time to the role. The NGO co-leads had to fund their own staff time (thus detracting from their ability to undertake agency-specific work), as well as fund the costs of communications, printing and travel.

In January 2009, nine months after the co-facilitator role was introduced in DRC, the experience was reviewed with the following findings and recommendations:[16]

- All stakeholders felt that the NGO co-facilitator role improved the pooled fund allocation process, adding a diversity of knowledge and perspectives.
- NGO co-facilitators felt that UN partners valued their contributions.
- The co-facilitator role enhanced the needs-basis and transparency of the project allocation process; improving decision making and transparency within the cluster.
- NGO co-facilitators enabled changes (within cluster procedures, etc.) to take place more readily.

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[16] *Co-facilitation selon les co-facilitateurs,* paper by Nick Martlew, Humanitarian Reform Advisor, January 2009. The review was based on 11 responses out of the 20 co-leads contacted.

- NGO co-facilitators contributed towards making effective participation in the cluster more manageable for NGOs.
- For a number of the NGO co-facilitators, the process was time-consuming: over half of respondents estimated that the role took up 25% or more of their time. Without being alleviated of their other responsibilities, participating as co-facilitator was to the detriment of their other work.
- Both cluster leads and co-facilitators found the ToRs were helpful in delineating the role. Some co-facilitators had used the ToRs to explain the role to cluster members. A quarter of respondents had used the ToRs to ensure that they did not take on too many extra responsibilities in response to requests from the cluster lead.

The review made the following recommendations to the Humanitarian Coordinator:

- The role of NGO co-facilitators should be continued and the decision to do this should be communicated to cluster stakeholders as soon as possible.
- Using the learning from the initial round of co-facilitators' experiences, the ToRs for the co-facilitator role should be finalised and disseminated well before the next round of funding allocations starts.
- NGO co-facilitators should review their own experiences and learning and share these with stakeholders, including the pooled fund board, the Humanitarian Coordinator and other NGOs.
- Extend the role of NGO co-lead facilitators to provincial clusters.
- The Humanitarian Coordinator should meet with NGO co-facilitators, without their cluster lead counterparts, on a regular basis (six monthly) to review experiences and identify lessons learned and changes that need to be instituted.
- There should be a regular (annual) cluster co-facilitator selection process, something that would enable NGOs that wished to step down a set time to serve, and could potentially reinforce the importance of the role in the eyes of cluster participants.
- Donors need to ensure the timely disbursal of funds to facilitate better planning, and to make sufficient funds available for the cluster leads and NGO co-leads.

In October 2009, OCHA announced that the 2010 Humanitarian Action Plan was to include a standard budget provision for cluster coordination to cover staff costs relating to UN lead agency and NGO co-facilitator staff costs, plus core activities. Proper funding increases clusters' accountability for delivering on agreed goals.

Ethiopia

The Ethiopian context is characterised by strong overall government leadership. While the clusters exist, they work to support separate pre-existing government-led structures (Sectoral Task Forces). It is hoped that working under the leadership of the government will achieve a better division of labour amongst the organisations that support government response capacities. However, the implementation of clusters has been uneven in practice as confusion remains over leadership and their relationship to the Task Forces.

The government co-leads the clusters; as a result of this, NGOs are not regularly considered as co-leads. The exception is the Education Cluster, which is chaired by the Ministry of Education and co-chaired jointly by Save the Children and UNICEF. The Education Cluster meetings are held monthly at the Ministry of Education, with Save the Children and UNICEF co-coordinating cluster activities. At the regional level, UNICEF and Save the Children support the Regional Education Bureau in the coordination of Education Task Force meetings (the term 'cluster' is unknown regionally within Ethiopia). This model is not replicated with other clusters/sectoral Task Forces, though the benefits of NGO supporting coordination functions are recognised by cluster stakeholders as a positive contribution overall, especially at the regional level where capacity is lacking and federal support weak.

Zimbabwe

The cluster approach was not introduced in Zimbabwe until March 2008 and then was only gradually rolled out in the subsequent months. The introduction of NGO cluster co-chairs was discussed in the Humanitarian Country Team at the time. However, it was introduced in an *ad hoc* manner and no generic ToRs were devised. NGOs had insufficient opportunity to discuss this concept and as a result were not fully behind it. OCHA invited expressions of interest from NGOs but the email only went to Heads of Agency and did not include national NGOs or NGOs that do not attend the Heads of Agency meetings. NGO experiences thus varied depending on their participation in other forums outside the clusters themselves, as well as on how individual cluster leads decided to pursue implementation subsequently. At the time of the mapping studies research (February 2009), there were only two international NGO co-chairs of national level clusters.

Save the Children UK is the co-lead of the Education Cluster. At the time of researching for this paper, UNICEF did not have a dedicated cluster coordinator and Save the Children provided a cluster coordinator to perform this role for nine months in 2009. Save the Children was only able to deploy this full-time co-lead because of a headquarters-held grant that funds deployments of cluster coordinators.[17]

Initially only one cluster, WASH, introduced a co-lead role. The role was assumed by Oxfam, which was already active within the cluster. The Oxfam programme in Zimbabwe recruited further staff for its country office so that the staff member who was undertaking the cluster co-lead role could dedicate 50% of their time to the coordination role. Initially no funding was available for this role so it effectively meant that only a large NGO with sufficient resources could take up this role. At present, there is a proposal in the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) round to fund 50% of a co-lead's position.

NGOs have taken the lead in provincial level WASH clusters. However, these groups are limited to information sharing rather than coordination and strategic decision making. Representatives from these groups attend cluster meetings in Harare. Due to the increasing severity of the cholera crisis, World Vision Zimbabwe assumed provisional leadership in three provinces, again with no extra funding.

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[17] As well as Zimbabwe, the funding was used to employ education cluster co-leads in Pakistan, Indonesia, and Ethiopia during 2009.

Helen Keller International (HKI) initially expressed interest in assuming the co-lead role for the Nutrition Cluster, following the OCHA invitation. HKI was subsequently confirmed as co-lead by UNICEF without any discussion or nomination process taking place within the cluster to agree the best placed NGO for the role. Although UNICEF and HKI discussed the parameters of the role, a ToR was not drawn up, as both parties felt that this should be discussed by all cluster stakeholders. However, this did not happen and, although the two agencies worked in close collaboration for a period, the lack of clear definition of the co-lead role and the absence of dedicated funding meant that HKI found it increasingly difficult to fulfil the role and stepped down in July 2009.