

Protection Cluster Co-Facilitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Lessons Learned for Oxfam's Protection Cluster Support Project

Vance Culbert

Independent Consultant

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Executive Summary

Oxfam's protection cluster support project, which started in mid-2010, combined cluster co-facilitation with the development of cluster tools and the strengthening of cluster processes in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Several of the lessons learned are of broader use to agencies involved in cluster co-facilitation both within protection and more generally. Direct co-facilitation of the cluster in Orientale transformed a low-functioning provincial protection cluster into one of the more active in the country and increased awareness of, and response to, provincial protection issues at the national level. Activities to improve the effectiveness of the protection clusters across the east included support for annual processes such as the Humanitarian Action Plan, and the production of several procedural and advocacy tools and resources such as the Protection Toolkit and the Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit. Standard impact indicators for protection programs were developed, adopted by the protection cluster at the national level, and are in the process of being adopted by the Pooled Fund. The project also worked to increase the meaningful involvement of Congolese NGOs in the protection cluster through training workshops.

NGO's bring several distinct advantages to their role as co-facilitators, including encouraging greater inclusivity and ensuring linkages to communities through connections to programs. Oxfam's project underlined the importance of focusing on the added value of NGO's and avoiding acting as a replacement to the cluster lead. Oxfam particularly brought strong protection and advocacy expertise to the cluster, as well as a strong engagement with humanitarian reform in DRC and the capacity to bring concerns raised in the provinces to the attention of national actors through a proactive advocacy coordinator based in Kinshasa.

Due both to the decentralized nature of the protection cluster in the DRC and a series of changing leads and co-facilitators, it has historically been difficult to ensure the uptake and long-term durability of support tools developed. The national cluster does not standardize cluster tools across the country. Providing effective support to the coordination of protection initiatives was dependent upon the regionally distinct characteristics of provincial and national protection clusters and their relationships with the range of other protection structures within the UN integrated mission. The protection cluster is not the primary forum for a number of protection issues, including sexual violence, within UN and state-led coordination systems in the DRC, and there is a lack of systematic coordination between these systems.

Map



Introduction

The humanitarian context in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is often referred to as a protection crisis. This is demonstrated in the priorities of international actors present in the country. The first of the four priorities listed in the 2011 Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) is to “strengthen the protection of the vulnerable civilian population in humanitarian response zones.”¹ The United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), which is the world’s largest peace-keeping mission, also has a mandate largely focused on the protection of civilians.

The cluster system in the DRC received mixed support from NGOs after the cluster system’s roll-out. In response the DFID funded the Humanitarian Reform Project (NHRP), an initiative intended to improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian response, through greater involvement of NGOs in humanitarian reform mechanisms. It was led by Action Aid at a global level and hosted by Oxfam GB in DRC. Over the past three years there has been support amongst UN agencies, NGOs and donors to increase cluster effectiveness by the provision of NGO co-facilitators. Due to the nature of the ongoing crisis, the protection cluster has been considered a priority.

Oxfam’s cluster support project was designed as more than just the provision of co-facilitation through dedicated staff. It also aimed to strengthen structures and tools to support the cluster system both at and between the provincial and the national levels.

The co-facilitation component of the project was based in Province Orientale. The success of the project, which was able to link local issues to national and international protection initiatives, was partially linked to the importance of providing a protection response to LRA atrocities.

Support activities such as trainings, the creation of tools, and promotion of provincial-national coordination are often low-profile activities whose outcomes are not easily visible. A significant number of tools were produced by the project. The future success of these products will largely depend on the degree to which they are taken onboard by the cluster lead, by cluster members, and incorporated into funding mechanisms.

The impacts of specific protection activities are often difficult to map. Establishing causality is often challenging to prove in interventions in fields which involve complex political, military, and socio-economic factors. One of the objectives of this project was to try to improve and standardize monitoring and evaluation of protection activities. This initiative included the promotion of impact indicators over output indicators.

The protection cluster support project cannot be measured as an isolated intervention. The efficacy of the provincial and national protection clusters vary significantly, being

¹ “Humanitarian Action Plan: DRC,” OCHA, 2011, p. 2.

dependent upon the agencies and individuals that participate, their perceived objectives, and advocacy methods chosen.

The ability of the protection cluster to achieve its objectives is also dependent upon its ability to access and influence local, national and international actors to respond to protection concerns. The efficacy of the cluster is partially determined by its relations to the range of other protection structures within the UN/NGO system in the DRC. This review also therefore examines the structural context within which the protection cluster operated.

Approach and Methodology

The review of Oxfam's protection cluster project was carried out in June of 2011. One objective of the review was examine how Oxfam's experience could help inform the work of other NGOs undertaking both general and protection cluster co-facilitation in the future. This 'lessons learned' document is not an evaluation of Oxfam's performance.

The review was undertaken using over 50 personal interviews, attendance at cluster and thematic working group meetings and review of background documentation. The review included visits to Bunia and Dungu in Province Orientale, to Goma and Bukavu in the Kivus, and to Kinshasa. A workshop was held in Goma on June 22 with participants from the national and provincial protection clusters. Initial findings were presented at this workshop. This offered an opportunity for feed-back and a platform for discussion of issues and concerns that had been raised by people interviewed during the review.

Protection Cluster Structure

The Evolution of the Protection Cluster in the DRC

While UNHCR has been the protection cluster lead in the DRC since the roll-out of the cluster system, cluster co-facilitation was not originally the domain of NGOs. The earliest co-facilitator of the protection cluster was MONUC. The specific substantive sections of MONUC which held this role varied by region and over time, including the Civil Affairs Section (CAS), Human Rights (HR) and Political Affairs. The choice of sections was partially based on the fact that MONUC /MONUSCO CAS and the HR sections work together on protection. CAS took the co-facilitator role in North and South Kivu. In Kinshasa, CAS replaced Political Affairs as co-facilitator in 2007. MONUC Human Rights became the co-facilitator in most other places in the country.

By 2007, NGOs and some UN agencies were raising strong concerns about MONUC's involvement in co-facilitation. The strongest concerns centered on MONUC's lack of

neutrality due to its support for the FARDC's military operations. Objections were also raised that cluster leadership should not be held by two UN bodies. In 2008 the Humanitarian Coordinator stated that all clusters should have NGO co-facilitators. MONUC stopped co-facilitating the protection cluster in Kinshasa and the Kivus in 2009 and in most of Orientale in 2010. MONUSCO HR continues to co-facilitate in Kisangani.

Starting in 2008, a significant number of clusters started to have NGO co-facilitators. Save the Children took the role of national protection cluster co-facilitator from June 2008 to March 2009. However, as with UN agencies, most of these NGOs did not have full time dedicated staff and were not prepared for the associated work-load. Many of these NGOs subsequently withdrew from these positions.

From 2009 strengthening the cluster system, with a particular focus on the protection cluster, became a priority for some donors. Funding for full time NGO co-facilitators was included in the 2011 Pooled Funding allocation. ECHO, which is not a contributor to the Pooled Fund, was the first to fund co-facilitators starting in 2010. Donor support remains strong for funding full-time cluster leads and NGO co-facilitators, despite what has proven to be a generally low response from NGOs. Through a combination of HCR internal funding, ECHO support and Pooled Funding, the number of dedicated lead and co-facilitator posts for protection clusters in the DRC next year is projected as eight staff. These will be based in Kinshasa, the Kivus and Orientale.

The cluster system in the DRC was evaluated as a case study country of the second IASC global cluster evaluation in 2010.² While this evaluation was of the cluster system as a whole, a number of the conclusions of the report are pertinent to the protection cluster and were reflected in interviews held during this review. Some of the conclusions will thus be revisited here with specific attention to how the cluster support project was able to address these challenges.

Regional Differences

The disparate structures and objectives of the provincial protection structures in Eastern DRC helped shape the outcomes of Oxfam's cluster support project. The relationship between the provincial and national clusters, and Oxfam's role at the national level were equally important. Below is a brief overview of the relevant protection clusters with the greatest focus on Province Orientale, where Oxfam's full time cluster co-facilitator is based.

Orientale

Overview and structure

² "Democratic Republic of Congo: IASC Cluster Approach Evaluation, 2nd Phase Country Study," Binder, Andrea, de Geoffroy, Véronique and Sokpoh, Bonaventure, April 2010 and "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report", Steets et al., April 2010.

Province Orientale has two separate cluster systems. The main cluster for the eastern part of the province is based in Bunia in Ituri territory, with a sub-cluster in Dungu which covers Haut and Bas Uélé. This cluster was co-facilitated by MONUSCO Human Rights until Oxfam took over the role in 2010. The second cluster, which was not visited during this review, is based in Kisangani and remains co-facilitated by MONUSCO HR.

There is very little communication between the Bunia and Kisangani clusters. This is in contrast to the MONUSCO civilian substantive sections which follow the state governance structure and mostly, although not exclusively, report to Kisangani as the provincial capital. MONUSCO military reports to Bunia. This lack of common structure is a significant barrier to joint decision making and planning both within MONUSCO and in its cooperation with other UN agencies and the protection cluster.

Protection Priorities

The primary protection concerns in Haut and Bas Uélé are attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the resultant displacement of 400,000 people across the region³. With the increased deployment of the FARDC to the area after the Christmas massacres in 2008 and 2009 committed by the LRA, violations related to the FARDC have also increased. The Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) is also present and is scheduled to soon be withdrawn from the area. As the largest majority of the areas where the LRA is located are of the Zande ethnic group, there is little inter-communal violence reported, but tensions have been growing between IDPs and local communities wherever access to fertile land is an issue. This is the case in Aba, north east of Faradje territory.

The international attention on the LRA has meant that other protection concerns have been lower profile. In the Uéléés this includes specific attention to those already displaced to larger centers and violations related to state authorities.

Responding to the LRA is a major challenge for the protection cluster. There currently appears to be no international actors or community structures in contact with them. The main protection approach is focused on physical security of communities either through early warning systems or through advocacy for a greater presence of the FARDC and MONUSCO. Joint agency responses to LRA attacks are limited both by the low capacity of actors with the appropriate services and by the fact that almost no agencies have regular presence in the core LRA areas due to security concerns. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are exceptions to this. Both of these actors hold observer roles in the sub-cluster. UN agencies only travel to the affected areas in armed convoy.

State structures are few in northern areas of the Uéléés, although not entirely absent. The main form of state presence is the FARDC. Local authorities and civil society actors, including traditional chiefs and churches, are also present. The Zande Grand Chief, displaced and living in Dungu, listed MSF, the ICRC, CAS and Disarmament, Demobilisation,

³ "UNHCR Seeing New Resistance by Lord's Resistance Army," UNHCR, 10 Oct. 2010.

Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Repatriation (DDRRR) as the agencies/sections most frequently in contact with him regarding their work. This may not be a reflection of levels of engagement in the villages.

UN agencies and the MONUSCO substantive sections share a common base in Dungu, separated by a fence. Nonetheless the protection cluster and the substantive sections face the same barriers to communication and lack of understanding of means of operation that are common elsewhere in the country. This is compounded by the lack of common geographical reporting lines. UNHCR and OCHA provide only a partial bridge between the two. One result is lack of information sharing between parallel information sources. MONUSCO already coordinates information collected from CAS, Human Rights, DDRRR and Child Protection sections and the military, each of which have different objectives and confidentiality concerns. The protection cluster has partially used a lobbying approach towards MONUSCO in order to get it to respond to particular protection issues.

The experience of the Oxfam co-facilitator when he arrived in Dungu was that no tools were in place. While during this review the consultant did not find any tools that may have pre-dated Oxfam's involvement in the cluster, this turn-over raises the possibility that tools and procedures were lost with the change of co-facilitators.

The cluster in Bunia is more established than the Dungu sub-cluster, and works in a more stable context. Cluster meetings involve more participants, including a large number of national NGOs. However some key actors do not regularly attend, leaving the cluster challenged to address key issues such as land conflict.

There was an attempt in Bunia in 2011 to set participation criteria for NGO involvement to ensure that only NGOs who were active in protection participated. This raised challenging questions of efficacy vs. inclusiveness, and response vs. capacity building. Interviews for this review showed strongly divided opinions on this question. While new participation criteria were introduced, they were not strictly enforced.

The Protection Matrix is a tool which prioritizes areas with high protection concerns to give guidance to the deployment of MONUSCO forces. The matrix has been recently resurrected in Orientale after a period of disuse. Protection actors in Province Orientale universally felt at the time of this evaluation that this tool did not have any impact on MONUSCO's deployments. In June 2011 the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) decided that the protection matrix needed to be updated and that force deployments needed to reflect protection priorities. Cluster members felt that this update was rapidly done by the MONUSCO substantive sections using information from their sources but little or no changes were made to actual deployments and that the protection cluster was not consulted in this process. Since this time, coordination on the protection matrix has improved and the inputs from the protection cluster have been included.

North Kivu

The North Kivu protection cluster is based in Goma, with a sub-cluster in Beni. As Goma is the main base for many agencies working in eastern DRC, the cluster sees higher level participation than in the other provinces.

North Kivu has a protection emergency response forum, called the Emergency Protection Cell (EPC). The EPC, which is a joint initiative between UNICEF, UNHRC and MONUCSO sections, was activated in 2009. While the TOR for the EPC was described as originating in Kinshasa, nobody outside of North Kivu referred to them, and the cell has not been activated for emergency response in the past 12 months. The same actors however, along with leads of other working groups, form the task force of the cluster; due to the membership criteria there is therefore a heavy UN majority and little NGO participation.

The North Kivu protection cluster has also changed its policy on the inclusion of national NGOs. Whilst until 2008 the cluster had a policy of exclusively international NGO and UN participation due to the sensitivity of information shared, concerns that a large number of participants were not active protection actors led to an opening for two national NGOs, partners of an international NGO, to participate. There has since been a shift towards greater participation of local NGOs, who currently make up a large part of cluster membership. This has led to increased local knowledge; it has also moved the cluster towards being more of a briefing and away from being a strategic forum. Cluster training shifted from an external focus (for example towards the FARDC) towards internal capacity building.

The Protection Matrix is updated once a month in North Kivu by the protection cluster, led by CAS. Unlike in Orientale and South Kivu, actors in North Kivu felt that the Protection Matrix had impact on force deployments and that the matrix meeting was a key forum in which to discuss protection priorities.

South Kivu

In 2008 the protection cluster shifted from Uvira to Bukavu. As in North Kivu, MONUSCO Civil Affairs was the cluster co-facilitator up until the end of 2008. The protection cluster was then co-facilitated for one year by the international NGO, The Life and Peace Institute. South Kivu has seen substantial fluctuations on the number of staff dedicated to the protection cluster and sub-clusters over time.

As in Orientale, there is a lack of uniformity between reporting lines for UN agencies and MONUSCO substantive sections, with several substantive sections in Uvira reporting directly to Kinshasa.

Unlike in other provinces, agencies in South Kivu systematically listed geographical areas as protection priorities, as opposed to specific issues. Zones with shifting control between the FDLR and the FARDC have the greatest number of rights violations. During previous military campaigns, the military did not report to the governor. It effectively took over

much of the local administration in rural areas, including the justice system. This has now changed, and the FARDC is undergoing re-organization.

Most agencies are not present in many of the areas of highest protection concerns. This is partially due to security concerns and partially due to the physical difficulties of access. Some of the more remote areas can only be accessed by several days travel on foot. Due to the province's geographical approach to protection concerns, a priority activity listed by cluster members which was not raised elsewhere was the construction of roads to areas most affected by protection violations.

The South Kivu cluster has used the protection matrix in a different manner than in the other provinces. The matrix evolved into a general gap analysis tool and no longer focuses solely on MONUSCO coverage. As in Orientale, the HC requested that the protection matrix be updated in mid-2011. This update was initially done by MONUSCO substantive sections, and not by the protection cluster; at the time of the evaluation cluster members did not feel that their input had an effect on MONUSCO deployments. As in Orientale, the protection cluster has been more involved since.

The National Cluster

The national protection cluster does not have a hierarchical role over the provincial clusters. The cluster system in the DRC was designed to have a decentralized structure. While this decentralized approach was recognized by most people interviewed, the exact relationship between the provinces and the national cluster remained unclear with most people looking for a greater role from Kinshasa. While the structure has allowed the provincial clusters to develop strategies based on regional needs, it has also presented serious barriers to creating and maintaining standardized structures and tools across the country.

The lack of standardization of tools is apparent in the process of centralizing information. While the national cluster produces two page weekly protection summaries which are designed to be short enough for broad consumption, Kinshasa does not have the capacity to compile the information that it currently receives in a range of forms. Partially as a result, donor processes including the HAP and the Pooled-Fund have become the cluster's main strategic tools.

The national cluster faces the challenge that a significant number of international NGOs are based in the East, and do not have senior representation in Kinshasa. This contributes to the relatively low participation of NGOs in the national cluster. Those agencies that are present largely work in the East, which also leads the national cluster to focus on eastern issues, with less attention paid to protection concerns in other parts of the country.

In January 2010 the integrated mission in the DRC produced the UN System-Wide Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This comprehensive document provides the framework for cooperation between MONUSCO, the protection

cluster and national authorities including through engagement with National Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan (STAREC). This structure was more frequently referred to by members of MONUSCO's substantive sections than by cluster members.

Oxfam's role in the national protection cluster is that of a regular member. However as both the Oxfam Country Director and advocacy lead are based in Kinshasa, this allowed for them to play a significant role in the national cluster as well.

The Protection Cluster Support Project

Oxfam's Protection Cluster Support Project had two objectives; direct cluster co-facilitation and the broader development of cluster support tools. These objectives are described below.

Co-Facilitation

The most commonly evoked distinction between the roles of cluster leads and co-facilitators is that co-facilitation does not include the responsibility of provider of last resort. In practice the role of provider of last resort is rarely taken on by the protection cluster lead in the DRC, as is the case with lead agencies in many other clusters. The lead agency instead focuses its resources and activities according to its internal strategic planning.

A more practical difference between the lead and co-facilitator roles is that the lead holds final decision making power. Decision making authority lies at the heart of the lead/co-facilitator relationship, although levels of decision making responsibility are not clearly spelled out in the TORs for the co-facilitator position. This therefore plays out very differently in different provinces.

In every office visited, UNHCR felt that as lead it had the responsibility to manage the co-facilitator's role, although there was a wide discrepancy in the extent of this management. Practical factors shaped this relationship. These included the lead's local capacity, the personal relationships between the co-facilitator and the lead and political and organizational pressures on the lead agency. In Orientale, where the lead had the smallest number of protection staff of the three eastern provinces, covering a vast area, the co-facilitator took on a central role in cluster management.

Running a cluster involves a substantial amount of administrative work. NGOs who take co-facilitation roles are frequently concerned that they will simply serve as a secretariat, with little substantive input. This is a legitimate concern, as was clearly reflected in comments by two cluster lead staff who stated that they did not need strategic support but somebody to do the leg work. However NGOs also frequently do not recognize how much administrative work managing a cluster entails, are equally reluctant to engage in this work, and therefore do not devote the necessary resources.

The co-facilitator's placement in Orientale was based on an assessment from the National Cluster and Oxfam that Orientale was both a high-priority province and was the region where the lead agency had the lowest resources for cluster management, resulting in a weak cluster that had not been sufficiently addressing provincial protection concerns. At the same time as Oxfam engaged a co-facilitator, UNHCR also made efforts to maximize capacity in the province. The co-facilitator post covered both the cluster in Bunia and the sub-cluster in Dungu. The project was not designed to replace the work of the cluster lead but to strengthen the lead through the provision of support. Officers from the cluster lead wanted more human resources in order to do their job properly. A ceiling of 50% was therefore set as a maximum time to be spent by the co-facilitator on direct cluster management.

Other tasks of the co-facilitator included implementation of tools and good practices, some of which were to be developed by the cluster support officer. Of particular concern was impact measurement, ensuring that gender concerns were addressed both in protection responses and in more general programming, capacity building of cluster members and increased dialogue with external actors.

People interviewed pointed to a range of changes that they had observed since the arrival of the co-facilitator which could be attributed to his work in cooperation with the cluster lead and cluster members. These included:

- Improved analysis and strategies. The creation of a provincial needs-based protection strategy with prioritization of protection issues and a plan of action.
- Cluster level advocacy and interventions in the name of the cluster by agencies that are protection actors. This included training of local military/police being done as a joint project in the name of the cluster, with several agencies contributing. Advocacy notes were prepared addressing issues such as attacks on the Mbororo (a group of nomadic herders, originally from Mali), the need for improved Early Warning Systems and the need for a better response to incidents on the Dungu-Doruma corridor.
- Greater NGO contribution to the work of the cluster.
- Capacity building on protection work both for cluster members and external actors.
- Systematic use of the Who does What Where reports and the protection matrix.
- Clear administrative documents and processes including TORs, regular monthly reporting and tracking documents for follow-up on advocacy.

Institutionalization of these tools remains an ongoing process. The co-facilitator stated that it took six months to build up the cluster and increase commitment from other agencies. Further time was required to gain the buy-in of additional actors.

Part of the reason for the success of the co-facilitator's role was his immersion in Oxfam's larger protection and advocacy structures. The cluster's priority protection concern in the Uélé is the LRA; this has been a national and international advocacy priority for Oxfam

since 2009. The presence of a very proactive Oxfam advocacy coordinator in Kinshasa also meant that issues brought up in Orientale were reinforced at the national level. This was of particular import as issues frequently did not make it through the cluster structure itself.

Challenges

Problems across Province Orientale are not homogenous. Ituri is a more stable region than Haut Uélé and Bas Uélé. Despite Bunia being a larger town with a substantially greater presence of international organizations, the scale of the impact from the LRA activities in the Uélés means that protection priorities in Ituri, largely related to land conflict, have less visibility. These issues have nonetheless received significant attention from the protection cluster. The co-facilitator spent half of his time in Bunia. The Pooled Fund protection cluster strategy also addressed these different concerns, although there remains little effective response to land and property conflict.

The presence of a full-time dedicated cluster co-facilitator in an area where the lead agency was under-resourced meant that the co-facilitator largely took over direct cluster management. The focal point of the lead agency in Bunia was often not present due to other priority tasks, and the role was shared between several staff. The lead agency in Dungu was happy to have somebody who could take the cluster much further than would have been the case if it was leading without a co-facilitator. There was also clearly a greater replacement of the lead agency's role than had been foreseen in the project design.

Despite the high level of structural support that the co-facilitator received from his own organization, the role was geographically isolated. The co-facilitator did not have the benefit of extensive protection projects which would have allowed for greater exposure to, and outreach towards, communities. People in interviews also noted that the co-facilitator needed to ensure the separation of cluster priorities from organizational priorities, a challenge that cluster leads have frequently faced.

Cluster Structural Support

The cluster support component of the project was designed to develop joint tools, trainings, and reporting structures in the three eastern provinces. The support component had several aspects. A full-time staff position was dedicated to this work. Two external consultants were hired for a two-week consultancy during which time they developed protection indicators at a workshop held with members from the different clusters. The co-facilitator in Orientale also contributed to the development of these tools. A workshop was held at the end of June including cluster members from across the country for a final round of discussions and approval of tools created.

The cluster support officer was intended to work on behalf of the national cluster with a specific focus on the eastern provinces. The support role included capacity building of cluster members, improving existing procedural and strategic tools and creating new tools

where needed and providing advice to the provincial clusters. Cluster management remained the responsibility of UNHCR.

The cluster support officer was also involved in directly following up regional initiatives in Kinshasa. While the TORs called for quarterly reporting to the national protection cluster, these trips also became advocacy trips to promote provincial initiatives such as the elaboration of the HAP and the selection of projects within and Pooled Fund mechanism.

A significant number of tools were developed and trainings held in the support component of the project, in addition to those tools specific to Province Orientale. These included:

- Initial base-line and 6 month surveys of perceptions of the effectiveness of the cluster by cluster members.
- Cluster structural documents, including TORs and membership guidelines.
- Workshops on information management, Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) preparation and cluster capacity building.
- Protection Tool-kit
- Monitoring and Evaluation Tool-kit
- Protection indicators
- Better inclusion of Gender in Protection interventions

Monitoring, Evaluation and Indicators

One component of the cluster support project was the creation of Monitoring and Evaluation indicators for protection projects. Protection is one of the hardest fields in which to develop effective indicators. This is both because protection activities are frequently focused on processes rather than specific service provision and because of the difficulty of establishing causality between protection activities and outcomes due to complex social dynamics. Output indicators are much more frequently used than outcome indicators.

The majority of agencies interviewed felt that those outcome indicators highlighted by the project successfully reflected a significant improvement on the output indicators used by many protection programs. The process of creating the indicators stressed the importance of accountability to affected populations. This was achieved in some instances by seeking to measure perceptions of change by communities and beneficiaries. In the example of response to community conflict, the impact indicator is “A decrease in the feelings of fear and mistrust amongst the parties involved in the conflict.”⁴

Several concerns were raised in interviews about these indicators. One concern was that the indicators involved measuring highly subjective criteria. Another concern was that no base-line currently exists for many of the areas to be measured. Some agencies also noted that internal reporting procedures and pre-established organizational indicators excluded the adoption of external indicators.

⁴ “Indicateurs Principaux Cluster Protection”, Outcome Indicator 7.3, March 2011.

As with other tools, the success of a process of developing indicators is dependent upon their subsequent use. Frequent staff turn-over contributes to the loss of institutional knowledge of previous tools, which are later re-invented. It is still not clear how deeply embedded the new M&E indicators are. Quite significantly, there is wide buy-in to adopting them for the HAP planning process for 2012, and the Pooled Funding mechanism has also indicated it would be prepared to adopt them for 2012. However this seems to be considered as a top-down imposition by several of the organizations interviewed, with not even the cluster leads in the field offices feeling that they had a role in promoting the indicators for more general use.

Challenges

The DRC protection clusters have a strongly decentralized structure and the national cluster does not have a strong steering role over the provincial clusters, nor has it taken up the task of trying to promote standardized national tools. Cluster support depended on direct engagement with the provincial protection clusters. This made it difficult both to create regional support tools and to assure uptake of tools created. It is not possible at this stage to say how many of the tools developed will still be in use after six months or one year. Those interviewed felt by a large margin that a cluster support role which is not tied to one of the provincial clusters is difficult to execute within the DRC protection structure.

Factors Shaping Protection Coordination

Challenges facing the Protection Cluster

The protection cluster faces several challenges in the DRC. Some of these are linked to structure, such as the response to sexual violence and funding systems. Several of the observations brought out in the 2010 IASC DRC Cluster Evaluation⁵ were clearly evident during this review and are addressed here.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a core protection concern in the DRC. As is the case with the LRA in the Uélé, sexual violence in eastern provinces has a very high international profile. This has led to significant attention and funding in the Kivus. STAREC and the “Synergie Nationale pour la Lutte Contre la Violence Sexuelle” have become the primary protection forums for response to sexual violence, with the participation of a wide range government ministries and UN actors; within the *synergie* itself, there are 4 pillars, all with separate meetings. For

⁵ IASC 2010, Binder et al.

these reasons the protection cluster is no longer a primary forum for addressing sexual violence.

The STAREC structure, which in tandem with the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS) has channeled funding flows comparable to the Pooled Fund, has had significant impact on the way a range of protection issues are addressed. The STAREC model is co-implemented with government ministries. UN agencies and substantive sections responsible for sectors such as Security Sector Reform (SSR) and support for the justice sector now partially frame their activities within the sexual violence structure.

The Pooled Fund

The way in which the protection cluster operated in the DRC was strongly affected by the Pooled Fund, a multi-donor trust fund. In 2010, the Pooled Fund in the DRC amounted to over \$100 million⁶.

The Pooled Fund is designed to increase cohesiveness and strategic direction in funding decisions. Key to this objective is ensuring that funding is informed by regional strategies, particularly through the cluster system. During interviews, there were split opinions amongst agencies over the extent to which protection clusters informed the allocation of protection funding, particularly given that the decision making process evolved over time.

The Pooled Fund process has influenced the way in which the protection cluster functions. A significant amount of time was devoted by clusters to the funding process at the expense of other cluster priorities. The Pooled Funding also partially determined cluster composition, encouraging participation of agencies with funding gaps and leading agencies with independent funding to have less interest in cluster processes. By focusing on strategic geographical areas, the Pooled Fund excluded specialized agencies that are focused on specific vulnerable groups. Of particular relevance to cluster leadership, the Pooled Fund has supported dedicated cluster leads. Some agencies noted that this represents a conflict of interest as the coordination system is making decisions on funding itself.

Division between protection actors

The parallel processes of humanitarian reform and integration of missions has created a lack of clarity over terms of engagement between protection actors both within the UN, and with NGOs. The IASC review states that:

“The cluster faces the challenge of mixing together different protection actors who have different mandates and different means/modes of action (from military protection to advocacy or capacity building strategy). The different perceptions lead regularly to a

⁶ Pooled Fund DRC Annual Report 2010. Unite Conjointe de Gestion Pooled Fund. OCHA/UNDP.

questioning of MONUC's place, its role within the cluster and tension between cluster members⁷."

This division ranges from the sharing of information to the form of response and the choice of forum for discussion. Lack of familiarity of mandates and approaches means that the cluster at times advocates actions towards agencies or sections which are outside of their mandate⁸. This can be seen in advocacy messages directed at sections within the integrated mission before direct discussions have been held. Despite their role as co-facilitators, NGOs are excluded from some protection coordination mechanisms at both the provincial and national levels, as indicated in the coordination structure overview below.

While several individuals had a good overview of the broader international structure, frequently NGOs, humanitarian agencies, and MONUSCO substantive sections all felt that they brought the best information to the protection cluster and had little to learn from other participants. MONUSCO sources of information include Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) which travel with MONUSCO deployments, DDRRR community agents, CAS community liaison assistants, HR monitoring, and MONUSCO military sources. Of these CAS appears to be the most likely to share information at protection clusters. Most of the rest of the information either passes through the provincial Senior Management Groups on Protection (SMGP-P), a forum which brings together the heads of the substantive sections and military of MONUSCO, OCHA and UNHCR in its role as cluster lead, but does not include NGOs or pass through provincial level coordination mechanisms. Clusters do not receive equal information from the humanitarian side either; UNHCR protection monitors were the most systematic contributors to the protection cluster.

Contact with authorities and civil society actors

While many NGOs have activities in communities, they are frequently less open to contacts with authorities. Due to their mandate of strengthening state institutions, MONUSCO substantive sections often have greater contact with state structures. Despite the fact that issues such as addressing impunity are protection cluster priorities, the clusters have scattered engagement with relevant national actors, noting their lack of capacity for substantive response.

Lack of continuity/decentralization

The review indicated not only that there is a range of tools, information gathering process and approaches to response across the provinces, but that the cohesiveness of the different clusters has fluctuated over time. While some agencies pointed to frequent staff turn-over, staff in the DRC have often been in-country for significantly longer periods than in many

⁷ Ibid, p. 71.

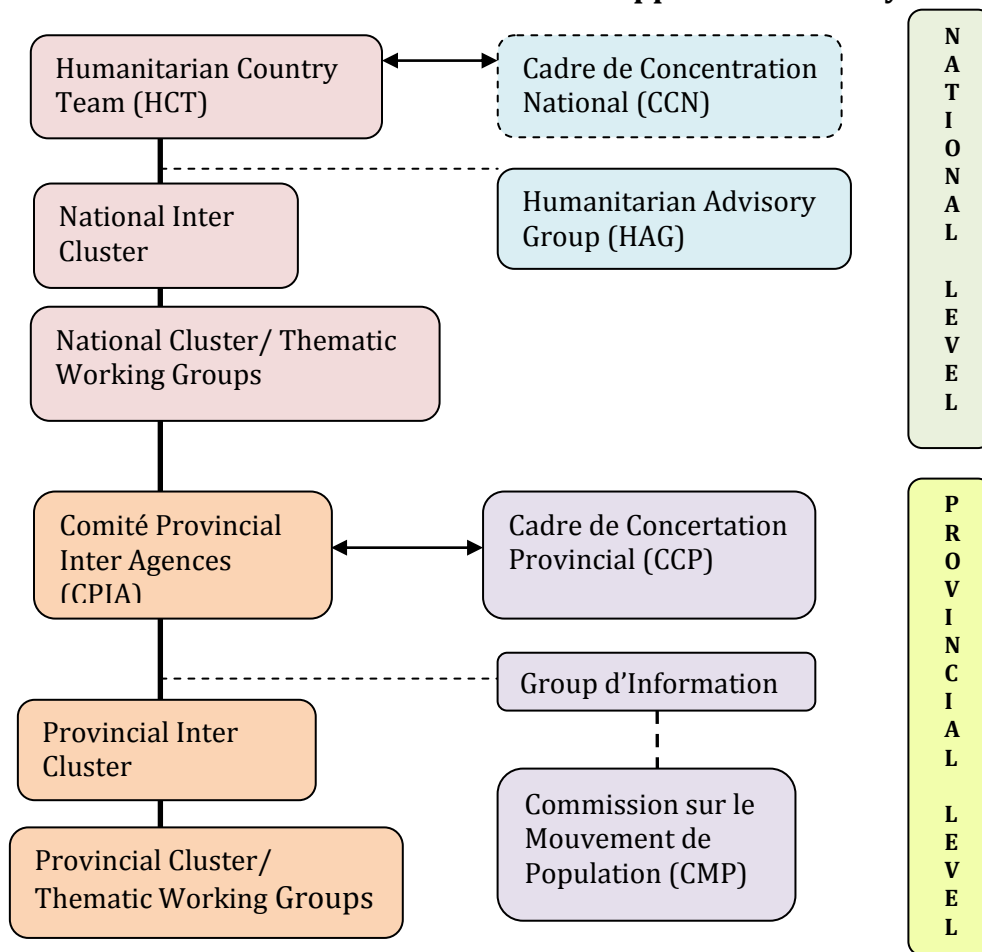
⁸ The IASC note states that "Systematic frictions are appearing among UN agencies that are both integrated into the peacekeeping mission and represent the clusters as cluster lead." p. 13.

other humanitarian contexts. NGOs in the DRC who have taken on the co-facilitation role have a bad record of continuity.

Mapping Protection Structures

The protection cluster is one of a range of forums for discussing protection issues in the DRC. The effectiveness of the protection cluster partially depends on how effectively it engages with these structures, and where decision making occurs. Below is a list of relevant structures where protection concerns can be raised on the humanitarian side of coordination.

Humanitarian Action coordination Mechanisms Supported or Run by OCHA DRC



Sourced from OCHA, 2011

These forums work alongside system-wide and MONUSCO-specific forums. Unlike in some countries, the protection cluster does not have, or does not take advantage of, direct access to the Humanitarian Coordinator. Standard TORs for cluster leads also raise the possibility of Head of Agencies representing cluster issues to the HC. This has not happened in the DRC.

The broader list of forums which address protection issues is given below.

Coordination Forums Which Address Protection Issues		
Structure (Lead)	Composition	Comments
HAG (Humanitarian Coordinator)	Heads of Mission, UN agencies, MONUSCO, NGOs, Donors	Outside standard structure but can be effective as has high-level representation
HCT (Humanitarian Coordinator)	UN agencies, 2 NGO observers	One of the highest-level decision making bodies, does not have a protection specific focus
CPIA (OCHA)	UN agencies, MONUSCO, 4-5 NGO representatives	Similar to provincial level IASC
SMGP (P) (MONUSCO)	MONUSCO, UNHCR, OCHA	National and Provincial. Primary MONUSCO protection forum
PWG (MONUSCO)	MONUSCO, UNHCR, OCHA	Working group for national SMGP
Inter-cluster (OCHA)	Cluster leads	Combined strategies have received higher attention than cluster specific strategies
National Protection Cluster (UNHCR)	UN agencies, NGOs, MONUSCO substantive sections	Does not have hierarchical responsibility over provincial clusters, few NGOs based in Kinshasa
STAREC (Minister of Planning)	UN agencies, Ministries	Primary forum for engagement with authorities on sexual violence
ISSSS	UN actors, Ministries	Works in parallel to STAREC
Thematic Working Groups	Concerned agencies	Rarely feed into larger strategies, more important for local response
Pooled Fund Board (HC)	HC, UN agencies, 5 NGO representatives	Responsible for funding decisions, including for protection programming

The protection cluster does not have direct access to all of these structures, and protection concerns must be raised through MONUSCO, NGO representatives, UNHCR or OCHA participating in the name of their organization. While UNHCR has the ability to represent the cluster, it is not always the protection cluster lead who attends these senior meetings. Due to time constraints and the lack of senior management by some organizations in

Kinshasa, most NGOs, UN agencies and MONUSCO substantive sections are selective in which forums they attend.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Findings

Project Outcomes

Oxfam’s project was generally successful at meeting the objectives set out in the project description. Several effects of the project are outlined in the table below.

Lessons from the Cluster Support Project		
Activity	Positives	Negatives
Co-facilitation	Increased effectiveness of cluster in response, strategy and advocacy	Weak links to communities due to limited protection programs in area
Structural support, creation of tools and cluster capacity building training	Improved functioning of clusters and understanding of protection programming by cluster members	Unclear uptake and durability of some tools, particularly due to decentralized structure
Support to project by core agency staff	Regional issues followed-up at national and international levels	Cluster work absorbs large amounts of time from non-cluster dedicated staff
Donor funding for cluster support	-Increased accountability for cluster support role -Additional human resources	Increased focus on cluster at expense of other protection initiatives

Better cluster coordination does not automatically result in improved protection for communities. Measuring the impacts of improved coordination on delivery of humanitarian services is under-studied in many clusters, and attribution is particularly challenging for the protection cluster. A survey was made of cluster members both at the beginning the cluster support project and after six months to get impressions of changes to the way in which the cluster functioned. However the task of trying to measure the actual impact of the protection cluster on communities is much more challenging. This task would require assessment of direct activities carried out by the cluster such as advocacy initiatives and identifying areas in which additional protection initiatives were carried out due to cluster

prioritization in strategic plans. The impact indicators developed during the project could be a useful starting tool for this.

NGO's Added Value

There is ongoing debate over the value of NGO co-facilitation. While NGOs frequently advocate for the co-facilitation role both nationally and internationally, there is also a feeling amongst many NGOs that cluster leadership is the UN's responsibility and that NGOs should not step in to fill the gap where UN agencies do not have, or do not prioritize, resources.

NGOs have noted a lack of their own resources as a principle barrier to taking on co-facilitation roles. However even with funds for co-facilitation available in the DRC, few NGOs have chosen to create full-time cluster co-facilitator positions. This is a reflection both of the amount of time and commitment that this role entails as well as recognition of the need for internal organizational expertise in order to do the job properly.

Added values of NGO co-facilitation in the DRC mentioned during the interviews and identified during the evaluation include the following:

- Operational experience
- Field-based information sources
- Independence from the UN system
- Rapport with other NGOs, decreasing perceptions that clusters are a UN-only structure
- Burden sharing of secretariat work
- Greater flexibility than UN agencies which are restricted by internal procedures and stricter security parameters.
- Connection to communities through status as civil society organizations
- Ability to raise issues through the NGOs own structure when information does not get passed effectively through the cluster system

NGOs should be able to contribute many of the above benefits as active cluster members without taking on the role of co-facilitators. However in practice co-facilitation leads to significantly greater influence on cluster processes through factors such as time committed, setting of agendas and drafting of documents. The added value of co-facilitation is however limited by the extent to which the cluster lead allows NGOs to participate in important decisions. The current architecture of protection structures in the DRC also excludes co-facilitators from many of the most important decision making forums.

A crucially important role of co-facilitators is to connect clusters to communities. The cluster system is usually only accountable either upwards to the national cluster or loosely to cluster members. An NGO, through its operations, can be better placed to observe community-level impacts of cluster processes and improve accountability to communities.

Recommendations

Conclusion 1

The project significantly improved participation, information sharing, strategizing, and response within the protection cluster in Orientale. Some challenges to the cluster support role were the wide geographical responsibility, competing expectations of the post, and difficulty of having a real influence on the cluster mechanisms as a staff member of an NGO without an officially clarified role in cluster leadership.

Recommendation 1: This direct co-facilitation model could be repeated in the future.

Conclusion 2

The project created several substantive support documents including improved protection impact indicators. Interviews did not indicate substantial uptake of these tools; their future is likely dependent upon incorporation into national planning structures and will require continued promotion.

Recommendation 2:

2.1 Short-term initiatives to create tools are unlikely to succeed if there is not substantial buy-in from actors who are able to institutionalize the tools. Any initiative which seeks to create tools need to take into account the necessary time, structures and processes to ensure this buy-in.

2.2 An increased role by the national cluster in ensuring standardized tools could help to ensure continuity.

Conclusion 3

The success of cluster co-facilitation is dependent upon the capacity of the implementing NGO in terms of competence in the sector, human resources and ability to engage the cluster system both in the field and at the national level.

Recommendation 3:

3.1 Cluster support should be nested within NGO's larger sector-specific structures, both at the national and local level. Through projects co-facilitators can benefit from connection to communities and local response mechanisms.

3.2 It must be recognized that cluster co-facilitation requires substantial inputs of time from staff not directly assigned to the project.

Conclusion 4

NGOs can bring specific added value to their role as co-facilitators.

Recommendation 4:

NGO co-facilitators should focus on their areas of added value and avoid duplicating or replacing the roles of the cluster lead. This should include working to promote accountability to affected populations by creating connections with communities.

Conclusion 5

NGO protection co-facilitators cannot access broader UN protection structures. This is a particular concern given that the protection cluster is not a primary decision making body for a range of protection issues at the national level.

Recommendation 5:

NGO co-facilitators should, where possible, have access to the same structures as the cluster lead, supplementing the strength of the cluster voice and feedback mechanisms to the cluster, and representing NGO perspectives. Given that structures such as the SMGP(-P) and PWG are not open to NGOs, a clear feedback mechanism should be developed with the cluster lead to the co-facilitator and to the cluster as a whole.

Acronyms

CAN	Community Alert Networks
CAS	Civil Affairs Section
CPIA	Comité Provincial Inter-Agence
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRRR	Disarmament, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Repatriation
EPC	Emergency Protection Cell
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda
GPC	Global Protection Cluster
HAG	Humanitarian Assistance Group
HAP	Humanitarian Assistance Plan
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ISSSS	International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy
JPT	Joint Protection Team
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the DRC
MONUSCO	United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC
MONUSCO HR	MONUSCO Human Rights
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NHRP	NGO Humanitarian Reform Project
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PNC	Congolese National Police
PWG	Protection Working Group
SMGP	Senior Management Group on Protection
SSR	Security Sector Reform
STAREC	National Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene