

OCHA Evaluations Synthesis Report, 2010

February 2011

OCHA



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I. INTRODUCTION

1. OCHA evaluations serve the dual purpose of *accountability* for performance and results and *learning* to inform policy discussions and strategic decisions of OCHA's senior management, as well as of other stakeholders. Individual evaluations inform on specific issues, activities or areas of work, with the aim of contributing to improved performance and organizational learning.
2. With the present report, however, OCHA aims to go beyond the individual accountability and learning of a single evaluation. The analysis here presented takes into account all of what has been achieved, discerned and learnt in each of the evaluations conducted in OCHA during 2010, and outlines those recurring issues and common themes identified as repeatedly affecting the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.
3. By identifying these recurring problems, OCHA intends to enlighten policy directions and strategic choices to be made by OCHA's senior management, to inform discussions on what are the most critical issues that need to be addressed to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance, to ensure corporate learning, and to update managers, partners and all other stakeholders on the insights and lessons learned across all evaluations conducted during the period of analysis.
4. Evaluations and reviews conducted by OCHA during 2010, and therefore included in this analysis are the following:
 - Review of the OCHA Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities (January, 2010);
 - IASC Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 (April, 2010);
 - IASC Review of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) (June, 2010);
 - OCHA Gender Review (September, 2010);
 - Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation (RTE) of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsaka and Parma in the Philippines (October, 2010).
 - Inter-Agency RTE on the response to Pakistan Displacements (August, 2010);
 - Inter-Agency RTE on the Response to Haiti's Earthquake (October, 2010);
 - Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake (December, 2010);
 - Evaluation of the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) (December, 2010).

II. RECURRING ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY 2010 EVALUATIONS

5. The present report is structured around recurring issues identified by 2010 OCHA evaluations as hampering the effective delivery of assistance. These findings are common to all evaluations, and therefore reflect systemic underlying problems and gaps that need to

be addressed to ensure the maximum impact of relief efforts in future emergencies.

1. ADEQUATE CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND COORDINATED NEEDS ASSESSMENTS ARE OFTEN ABSENT

6. Both a relevant analysis of the context of a humanitarian emergency, as well as the adequate assessment of the needs of the affected population are issues of recognized importance in OCHA. “A common approach to needs assessments and impact evaluation”, for example, is an important element of OCHA’s Strategic Objective 2 for 2010-2011¹. Albeit difficult undertakings in the midst of an emergency, well-conducted contextual analysis and needs assessments are key to providing an effective response to humanitarian crises. Understanding the context of an emergency is essential to developing assistance systems that work. Adequate and sufficient information on needs allows providing assistance right where it is necessary – rather than on the basis of assumptions – and facilitates delivering it in a coordinated manner. Helping implement a strong needs assessment system is not only one of OCHA’s core responsibilities; it is also the bases of an effective humanitarian financing and humanitarian response system.
7. However, the absence of solid analysis and needs assessments are important areas of concern in OCHA’s 2010 evaluations. For example, the Inter-Agency RTE in Haiti concludes that the extremely weak analysis of the context of the disaster impeded providing an adequate response: in trying to address the earthquake crisis, very limited information was collected on social structures, coping mechanisms, existing local capacities or Haitian civil society groups. As a result, to a large extent, the humanitarian response neglected the urban dimension of the disaster, ignored existing local capacities often, and initiatives by the affected population remained unknown.² Similarly, the RTE of the response to Pakistan’s displacements highlights a very limited analysis of security concerns, despite the fact that insecurity was a major problem for the humanitarian response in Pakistan. The absence of analysis imposed large operational costs and had a negative effect on programme quality.³

Box 1: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

On the basis of the evaluation findings, the IA RTE in Haiti concludes that a comprehensive analysis of humanitarian crises should strive to cover five key areas:

- Analysis of the context of the crises and how it may evolve;
- Humanitarian needs and how they may evolve;
- Existing capacities and the support which could be provided to strengthen them;
- Constraints affecting the response, with particular attention to the security situation;
- Timeliness of the information and analyses. The analysis should comprise mechanisms to ensure that this information is regularly updated.

management”.

² IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake; page 42.

³ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Pakistan’s 2009 Displacement Crisis, page 28.

8. OCHA 2010 evaluations also coincide to point out that humanitarian needs assessments conducted during emergencies are most often undertaken to feed the information needs of individual partners and agencies, at the cost of joint assessments and coordinated analysis. Common templates are not used; needs assessment data is not standardized, and therefore not comparable. The resulting multiplicity of needs assessments highly reduces the capacity to respond, and challenges coordination and information flows among the humanitarian community. Establishing the necessary linkages between identified needs and the response capacity analysis becomes very difficult. The evaluation of the humanitarian response in Philippines, for example, observes that “needs assessments were driven by individual organizations’ activities” which resulted in “large quantities of data that was not consolidated for the purpose of providing an overall picture of needs and existing gaps”.⁴
9. In several of the responses evaluated, the failure to facilitate quality needs assessments became a serious handicap to the entire response, and meant lost opportunities for the humanitarian community both in the provision of immediate assistance, as in the planning of recovery and reconstruction plans developed later. The Haiti evaluation, for example, concludes that the weak assessment of the situation “delayed the response and led to significant gaps in geographical and sector-based coverage”.⁵ In Philippines, “the lack of consolidated analysis of needs meant that interventions within the clusters were not prioritized to target those most in need”.⁶
10. While clusters facilitate the sharing of assessment results, their potential to conduct joint assessments, to improve assessment methods through learning, and to avoid duplications is not used, concludes the cluster evaluation in conformity with these findings. The role of the clusters has been restricted to disseminate the results of individual needs assessments and inform humanitarian actors about a given situation. Although clusters are currently not assigned with conducting needs assessments per se, several of the evaluations analyzed were of the view that they could play a central role in sector-based assessments, as well as in improving the quality of assessments through peer review mechanisms.⁷ In addition, suggest the Haiti evaluation and the IA RTE Haiti, OCHA should be adequately strengthened to be able to conduct global strategic analysis, risk assessments and multi-sector/cross-cutting analysis.⁸
11. Needs assessments also often lack consultations with the broader affected population, including women. In the response to Pakistan Displacements, for example, needs assessments consultations mainly took place with male leaders. This led to some inappropriate assistance, such as concentrating on shelter kits rather than on rent support or on the cost of house repair. Moreover, needs assessments often lack gender and age

⁴ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines; Page 18.

⁵ Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 47.

⁶ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines; Page 18.

⁷ See, for example, IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines: conclusion and recommendation 1 (page 20).

⁸ Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 47.

disaggregated data.⁹ As the IA RTE in Philippines concludes, “this renders vulnerable groups such as women, girls, children, the disabled and the elderly population invisible”.¹⁰

12. Several of the evaluations analyzed, identify a number of reasons that difficult contextual analysis and unified needs assessments¹¹:

- Lack of knowledge among humanitarian staff of the local context, culture or languages;
- Many humanitarian actors have strong internal policies on needs assessments that are difficult to change through coordination.
- Needs assessments are crucial for fundraising and as an entry point for organizations to specific areas and populations. Organizations have strong incentives for maintaining individual needs assessments.
- In most cases, clusters do not focus on activities related to needs assessments.

13. While they recognize that some of these issues are difficult to address, they highlight that an important step in the right direction would be the use of standard templates and information management procedures for needs assessments by cluster leads and cluster members, to facilitate and enhance situational analysis and consolidation of assessed data.

2. VARYING LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS OF HUMANITARIAN ACTORS AND THE ABSENCE OF INTEGRATED AND UPDATED CONTINGENCY PLANS HAVE AFFECTED THE CAPACITY TO RESPOND

14. Evaluation findings indicate that improved planning and preparedness are necessary to provide more effective and efficient responses to humanitarian crises in the future. The evaluation of the response to Pakistan’s displacements, for example, identifies as a key lesson for the future “the need for better level of preparedness, including contingency planning, having agency standard operating procedures, maintaining stockpiles, maintaining staff roster and supplier registers, etc”.¹²

15. While positive trends can be observed in activities of individual entities, several of the evaluations conducted conclude that the overall response to humanitarian crises has often been affected by a varying level of preparedness of humanitarian actors, as well as the absence of integrated and updated contingency plans.¹³

16. In the response in Philippines, while the evaluation found positive trends in the activities of individual agencies, at the inter-agency level, IASC members and government institutions did not agree on response standards beforehand, and sector and geographic coverage of the

⁹ See, for example, IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, page 47; IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines; page 20; IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Pakistan’s 2009 Displacement Crisis, page 41.

¹⁰ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, page 20.

¹¹ See, for example, Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 - Synthesis Report; IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines.

¹² IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Pakistan’s 2009 Displacement Crisis, page 38.

¹³ See, for example, IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, paras. 72 and 75; IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, page 38.

response were uneven due to the different levels of funding and delivery channels. The vast majority of private, governmental and international donations ended up being channeled through evacuation centres, and support for people outside these centers was late, irregular and insufficient.¹⁴

17. Likewise, the IA RTE in Haiti highlights that “operational agencies did not have a framework for their activities”, as a result of which the military could not be properly assigned tasks and the government could not be sufficiently engaged with and supported. The evaluation describes the situation as “humanitarians were neither methodologically not conceptually equipped to respond to a large-scale urban disaster”.¹⁵ Combined with the lack of contextual analysis, this led to a false start where camps were seen as units of intervention, instead of neighborhoods and administrative areas of the city.
18. The following table summarizes steps that OCHA 2010 evaluations deem important when planning responses to future emergencies:

Box 2: STEPS TO CONSIDER IN PLANNING RESPONSES TO FUTURE EMERGENCIES

- The HCT should hold consultation meetings with national and international experts in the context of the crises, to assess the most important first steps in response and preparedness for future disasters. Cluster meetings need to address issues in all areas affected, and devote specific time to discuss the rural and urban dimensions of the crises.
- The IASC/HCT should identify existing preparedness, response and coordination mechanisms and capacities, as well as appropriate partners in national and local authorities, to support and complement them where appropriate. This should be done before implementing clusters, to ensure appropriate links with rapid response mechanisms.
- The IASC/HCT, in consultation with the government, should develop a contingency plan that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of international and national actors and defines scenarios in which an international response is needed. Development Assistance Frameworks (DAF) prepared by UN agencies should focus on overall disaster risk reduction measures.
- Strengthened cooperation and coordination between clusters, national and development actors should take place at every stage, from preparedness to response and the transition to development.

19. Evaluations also highlight the importance of preparing the response to the crises in close cooperation with local authorities, civil society groups and development actors, to provide services needed together, when possible. The survival strategies of the affected population should be also systematically included in the response, as they are critical to effectively

¹⁴ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, page 3.

¹⁵ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, page 45.

responding to the emergency. Moreover, the interaction between humanitarian aid and local economies needs to be taken into account, in order to optimize positive contributions that both can make, as well as limit possible negative effects.¹⁶

3. WHILE THE CLUSTER APPROACH HAS HAD A POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE QUALITY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS CAN BE MADE TO INCREASE COORDINATION

20. The first objective of OCHA's Strategic Framework 2010-2011 is to achieve "a better coordinated, more equitable supported international humanitarian response system". Two main elements of this objective are "improved coordination structures at country, regional and international level" and "strengthened OCHA emergency response capacity".¹⁷
21. Findings from evaluations conducted in 2010 indicate that the cluster approach has had a positive effect on the quality of humanitarian response, and in facilitating efforts between the international community and governments. The IA RTE in Philippines, for example, concludes that clusters can facilitate the coordination of the international community and support the government with fewer counterparts.¹⁸ Evidence from the Cluster Evaluation shows that clusters help avoid duplications and enhance coverage in certain thematic areas. Clusters help the humanitarian system to identify and implement lessons, have strengthened peer accountability, and offer a platform for exchanging good practices. While often unable to resolve key problems in humanitarian assistance, clusters help focus attention on these problems and thereby increase the pressure to address them. In sum, clusters strengthen the humanitarian orientation of actors involved in relief operations. On the other side, clusters may reinforce the split between humanitarian and development actors or activities. In conflict situations, closer integration between different kinds of actors can also threaten the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality.¹⁹
22. However, cluster performance in the evaluations reviewed has been variable. In the response to Pakistan displacements, for example, many clusters lacked trained full-time coordinators, cluster coordination was split between Islamabad and Peshawar, and coordination at the field level was "left in the hands of the military for many months".²⁰ In the Philippines, two parallel coordination systems - one for national coordination and the other to coordinate the international effort - were introduced and rolled out. While overall coordination seemed to have functioned well at the capital level, this tendency seemed to have leveled off at decentralized levels.²¹ The Haiti internal evaluation highlights how, although clusters were activated within the first three days, it took about 2-3 weeks for all

¹⁶ See, for example IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, pages 45 and 48; IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, paras. 82 and 83.

¹⁷ OCHA's Strategic Objective 1; Strategic Framework 2010-2011.

¹⁸ See, for example, Cluster Approach Evaluation 2; IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, paras. 59 and 60.

¹⁹ Cluster Approach Evaluation 2, Synthesis Report.

²⁰ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Pakistan's 2009 Displacement Crisis, page 25.

²¹ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, paras. 82 and 83.

clusters to become functional, and inter-cluster coordination was weak throughout the crises. Linking coordination at national level with what was happening at local level remained an issue. Moreover, the evaluation describes, the interface between clusters and government-led coordination mechanisms was weak and there was no clear guidance on how the two related to each other and ensured coherence between humanitarian response and recovery/development work.²²

23. Findings from OCHA 2010 evaluations identify some of the root causes of these problems, and provide recommendations to augment the potential value added of the cluster approach.
24. The first of these causes refers to OCHA's role in inter-cluster coordination. Within the cluster approach, OCHA and the HCs are typically responsible for inter-cluster coordination. This role is crucial to ensure that cross-cutting issues that cannot be tackled by the individual clusters are addressed adequately, and to avoid duplications and gaps. At the country level, OCHA also plays a critical role by providing the framework and infrastructure for coordination. However, OCHA's role has been poorly defined, and in most cases has failed to create an effective inter-cluster coordination system, especially at the strategic level. At this level, proper articulation of country, regional and global decision-making levels is essential to avoid confusion and weakened accountability.
25. Coordination with or support to existing in-country coordination mechanisms is critical, as governments bear the primary responsibility for humanitarian response. The inclusion of local capacity into the relief, recovery and reconstruction phase increases the likelihood of longer-term positive effects. Evaluation findings indicate that overall coordination between the clusters and existing national response mechanisms is weak. As a result, the cluster approach has often weakened national ownership and capacity, and undermined the sustainability of achievements.
26. In addition, and although many resources have been invested in the cluster approach at the global level, cluster support at the country level is perceived as low. While main coordination tasks arise at the sub-national level, many clusters only have dedicated coordination at the national level. Thus, increasing the resources for the cluster approach at the local level is crucial. The Haiti and Philippines evaluations also recommend that local languages are used as working languages in the clusters, and that governments nominate focal points to engage with the clusters. Finally, and since often national and international actors do not sufficiently understand the roles, mandates and mechanisms of the clusters, it will be important to ensure clarity of these.

4. ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR EMERGENCIES HAS BEEN ACHIEVED WITH A VARYING DEGREE OF SUCCESS.

27. Evaluation findings demonstrate the importance of ensuring the necessary resources that will allow for a comprehensive humanitarian response, as foreseen in Flash Appeals.

²² Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 26.

Humanitarian organizations and donors need to ensure that the right resources are available at the right time. The Cluster Evaluation, for example, emphasizes the importance of sufficient funding, and recommends that together with all the necessary funding, adequate ways to link clusters and financing mechanisms are defined.²³ The IA RTE in Haiti recommends that humanitarian organizations and donors “get the resources right” by assessing existing local capacities and bringing in additional resources (in the form of money, staff with the right skills and language abilities, goods and services) to support these capacities.²⁴

28. Emergency responses evaluated during 2010, however, had a varying degree of success in securing required resources. The evaluation of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines highlights how, while the first Flash Appeal was well funded, the revised appeal was the fourth most under-funded Flash Appeal in 2009 – not surpassing 37%.²⁵ This evaluation concludes that the level of funding was affected by the inability to reflect in the Flash Appeal the UN’s capacity to work in an integrated manner, as several cluster recovery activities overlapped. The needs and scope of the Flash Appeal were overestimated, and the Appeal did not properly outline the most critical gaps in the “ongoing” response. In the future, the evaluation recommends, Flash Appeals should be presented in a more integrated, prioritized and complimentary way. Moreover, the preliminary Flash Appeal should focus on the most critical needs and life saving activities covering a 2 to 3 week period. A smaller number of clusters should be rolled out and recovery activities should be combined to avoid fragmentation.²⁶
29. Also in the Philippines, just before the Appeal was revised, the World Bank’s Post Disaster Needs Assessment was formulated upon the Government’s request, and shifted donors’ attention away from the Flash Appeal. To avoid this problem in future emergencies, the evaluation recommends that within six months of the emergency, the ERC, the Head of UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery and the World Bank clearly define the division of labor and the standard operating procedures among the UN Flash Appeal, UN recovery plans and the World Bank’s Post Disaster Needs Assessment, and that at the regional level the respective regional offices plan in advance how to divide roles and responsibilities. At the national level, the HC, OCHA’s Head of Office and the government should jointly determine the timing of each of these action plans.²⁷
30. In Haiti, on the other hand, OCHA’s leadership on appeal and financing was crucial in mobilizing support of the donor community for a massive humanitarian response.²⁸ The initial Flash Appeal of \$562 million was 100 percent funded a little over a month after the disaster, and the revised Appeal for Haiti was the best-funded of all appeals in 2010, with 70 per cent of its requirements covered.²⁹ Specialist staff sent by the CRD to prepare sit-reps proven critical to provide first-hand information for donors, public and managers,

²³ Cluster Approach Evaluation 2, Synthesis Report, para. 118.

²⁴ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, paras. 52 and 53, page 35.

²⁵ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, para. 33, page 22.

²⁶ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, para. 39, page 25.

²⁷ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, para. 40, page 26.

²⁸ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, para. 52, page 35.

²⁹ Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, pages 34 and 35.

were essential to achieve this. Daily key messages produced for the ERC, combined with media stories produced from the field enabled by embedding of a videographer with the UNDAC team were also good practices.³⁰

31. Humanitarian financing instruments have proven extremely valuable in the reviews conducted. In Haiti, the CERF allocated US\$36.6 million, with the first allocation of \$10 million authorized just hours after the earthquake struck, allowing agencies to kick-start the response. The decision to allocate the resources in Haiti was made predominantly at HQ level based on the experience of sector's needs, and it allowed CERF to play a crucial role, ensuring resources in the very early phase of the response.³¹ The ERRF also played a critical role in the earthquake response. Evaluations reviewed conclude that "the ERRF was able to fill funding gaps, ensure that most urgent actions were adequately resourced, and support under-funded clusters to maintain life-saving activities".³² Finally, and on these same lines, the CHF Evaluation concluded that the CHF has had a strong positive impact, encouraging NGOs to participate in the cluster system and take up humanitarian projects. For donors, the CHF has offered great savings on transaction costs, and has enabled them to support humanitarian efforts in countries in which they may not be able to operate and to reach a greater number of actors. Despite these positives, evaluations highlight that overall funding for CHFs has fallen from \$300 million in 2008 to just over \$200 million in 2010.³³
32. Although the involvement of clusters in planning processes has important benefits (including better analysis and prioritization and fewer duplications), evaluation findings point to the fact that this involvement can be counterproductive when clusters are engaged in budget allocation decisions. This situation can cause divergences between cluster members and create conflicts of interest for cluster lead organizations. Although the role of clusters as "providers of last resort" can be important to enable clusters to fill gaps, cluster leads rarely act as such. In the future, evaluations conclude, the governance of funding mechanisms needs to be improved, to limit conflicts of interest and ensure direct access of international and local NGOs to funding and enhance the transparency of financial transactions linked to clusters. Further defining what "provider of last resort" entails would also strengthen this role of the clusters.³⁴
33. In addition, when cluster members are financially dependent on cluster lead organizations and clusters maintain close relationships with integrated missions, peacekeeping forces or actors involved in a conflict, clusters can threaten the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality. Thus the cluster approach evaluation recommends that in the future, OCHA resolves outstanding policy issues (links to peacekeeping and political missions and humanitarian space, as well as institutional issues) at the global level, and develops concrete, context-sensitive guidelines on the linkages between clusters and peacekeeping and political missions.³⁵

³⁰ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, para. 52, page 35.

³¹ Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 35.

³² Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 36.

³³ CHF Evaluation synthesis report, page 3.

³⁴ See, for example, Cluster Approach Evaluation 2; CHF Evaluation synthesis report.

³⁵ Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 - synthesis report, conclusions.

5. LACK OF STRONG LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY HAVE AFFECTED THE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

34. In line with OCHA's Strategic Objective 3 "An effectively managed and responsive organization", all OCHA evaluations coincide to highlight the importance of strong and predictable leadership.
35. However, evaluation findings show that leadership remains an important issue that needs to be addressed, to ensure the effective management of humanitarian emergencies. While the Haiti RTE includes key examples in the Haiti response that demonstrate the positive effect of strong leadership – such as the Health and Food Clusters (UN leadership), WASH (national leadership), and the political and military branches of the UN mission – in many other instances weak leadership has negatively affected humanitarian response. The Haiti internal evaluation, for example, concludes that the failure to deploy experienced senior leaders in the country greatly affected OCHA's capacity to respond. The absence of a strong leadership in Haiti meant that there was no single central point for clearing of information, demands and queries made to the Country Office by different parts of HQ. This wasted a lot of time and caused frustrations.³⁶ Similarly, the RTE of the Response to Pakistan Displacements highlights how, while the Emergency Response Coordinator (ERC) in New York appointed a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) with solid humanitarian experience, the HC was not a full-time HC. An additional problem in Pakistan was that the Humanitarian Country Team was not an effective forum for leading the international humanitarian response as it should have been.³⁷ Finally, the PSEA Review highlights throughout its report, the importance of support from humanitarian leaders at the highest level to support PSEA implementation – the report argues this to be the most critical factor in securing progress in PSEA.³⁸
36. Evaluation findings also show that leadership responsibilities have not been sufficiently mainstreamed in cluster lead organizations. This is important, as the effectiveness of clusters critically depends on their management and focus. However, the Cluster Approach Evaluation concluded that many clusters are not managed effectively enough, and lack a clear focus on improving humanitarian response. Cluster coordinators often do not have enough time, possess insufficient coordination skills or are too junior to manage effectively. There is no general basic and practical guidance for cluster coordinators and critical general elements of guidance are missing. Although information sharing and management have improved, they are often still problematic. While OCHA plays a critical role for making clusters work at country level by providing the framework and infrastructure for coordination, interactions of the clusters with and accountability to Humanitarian Coordinators has remained minimal in most cases.³⁹
37. To address these problems, evaluations recommend OCHA and the IASC to develop guidelines on how to delegate and support some of the coordination functions to

³⁶ Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 51.

³⁷ IA RTE of the Humanitarian Response to Pakistan's 2009 Displacement Crisis, page 25

³⁸ Review of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), para. 189.

³⁹ Cluster Approach Evaluation. Synthesis Report, page 3.

government agencies; to identify, train and develop a small group of experienced and senior inter-cluster coordinators who can be readily deployed in complex emergencies when clusters are deployed⁴⁰; to ensure that coordinator positions be filled by sufficiently senior staff to ensure that the clusters have sufficient strategic weight, and that in future emergencies, the senior level leadership (HC) in country is strong and has the capacity to lead an appropriate response. Within OCHA, evaluations highlight the need to ensure that in 'corporate responses', the ERC appoints a senior leader (D2) as operations director, with full authority and responsibility to command and control all necessary resources with the organization.⁴¹

38. Within the cluster approach, evaluations recommend strengthening cluster management and implementation modalities by continuing to support the “mainstreaming” of cluster lead responsibilities; clarifying, recognizing and strengthening the role of OCHA; strengthening the role of Humanitarian Coordinators as part of the cluster approach; providing cluster coordinators with a standard, basic cluster management handbook or tool kit; and ensuring that they have sufficient time and adequate skills to fulfill their responsibilities.⁴²

6. THERE IS A CONTINUOUS NEED FOR GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

39. Evaluation findings indicate that important progress has been made by OCHA in the area of guidance. Thanks to guidance –indicates the Cluster Evaluation - the cluster approach has moved from a “period of total darkness” to a relatively well understood concept and practice, with guidelines from global IASC to national HCT and/or OCHA.
40. At the same time, however, two major problems persist: existing guidance is often not sufficiently known (including by cluster coordinators) and guidance on critical aspects is missing and strongly demanded by humanitarian actors.⁴³
41. Guidance already developed needs to be widely distributed to humanitarian actors, and evaluations recommend that OCHA considers using various means of dissemination of guidelines, in addition to those already used. The PSEA Review findings are a good example of this need. Considerable time and energy were spent at the inter-agency level by PSEA experts to produce effective tools, rigorous policy and guidance documents and a myriad of training and awareness-raising materials. Yet, as the PSEA Review indicates, despite these efforts, there has not been adequate traction at the field level. During the review, personnel and managers within agencies shown an inconsistent understanding of the obligations that PSEA policies place upon them. Thus, consideration needs to be given to making the tools that have already been developed more user-friendly for field personnel, and a redesigning their accessibility on the website.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Cluster approach evaluation 2, synthesis report, pages 80 and 81.

⁴¹ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, para. 148, page 63; Evaluation of OCHA Emergency Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 54.

⁴² Cluster approach evaluation 2, synthesis report, pages 80 and 81.

⁴³ Cluster approach evaluation, synthesis report, page 82.

⁴⁴ Review of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), para. 195, page 57.

42. Closely linked to guidance development is the issue of information management, also identified as a problematic area in the provision of humanitarian response. Information management refers to the sharing and dissemination of relevant information.
43. With regard to the cluster approach, evaluations concluded that the primary means for sharing information within many clusters are insufficiently facilitated meetings. This was seen as inefficient, as it takes much time, information is easily lost, it distracts from strategic planning and problem-solving, and can create the impression that clusters are mainly a mechanism for reporting. Moreover, maintaining institutional memory becomes very difficult. Clusters lose valuable information each time cluster coordinators change, which can happen as often as every few weeks.⁴⁵
44. Evaluations conclude that important OCHA information management tools are seen as useful in providing overviews and highlighting major gaps and duplications, but they are not always user-friendly or always work. In Haiti, for example, the evaluation concluded that although OCHA deployed the right IM capacity in the early phases of the response, and this contributed to the information needs of an evolving humanitarian response, some of the tools like the “Who does What Where” (3Ws) and One Response in particular did not work. Findings from other evaluations support this assessment, as they conclude that the 3Ws is not detailed enough to influence concrete planning at the local level. It can even be misleading sometimes, because it generally does not yet include information on the status of projects, i.e. whether projects are being implemented or only planned and financed or not. Many humanitarian actors therefore suggest adding “when” and “how” to the 3Ws. Similar observations were made by the RTE of the response to the Nargis cyclone; in that case, 3W data was of only limited value as it often did not provide sufficient detail for planning purposes.⁴⁶
45. Attempts to introduce more sophisticated and encompassing information management systems like the Gaza Response Activity Database (GRAD) in the oPt show that “these systems are very costly to establish, almost impossible to maintain and difficult to access for local organizations”.⁴⁷ Moreover, the cluster evaluation indicates, where several organizations record similar information, different and incompatible information management systems, or the use of different data types and methods of data collection have sometimes led to inefficiencies and even loss of data.

7. VERY LIMITED PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL ACTORS AND AFFECTED POPULATION HAMPERS EFFECTIVE RESPONSES AND SUSTAINED RECOVERY EFFORTS

46. A strong involvement of national actors and affected population is necessary to ensure that humanitarian actors can respond adequately to real needs and protect the dignity of the affected population. The cluster evaluation uses the term “ownership” to define the role of

⁴⁵ Cluster approach evaluation, synthesis report, recommendation 9.

⁴⁶ Evaluation of OCHA Emergency Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 45.

⁴⁷ Cluster approach evaluation 2, synthesis report, page 48.

national and local authorities (where appropriate) and civil society organizations in the coordination and provision of humanitarian response. Ownership is important because it can help mitigate the typical capacity-reducing effect of international humanitarian assistance or even support the strengthening of local capacities and help ensure that gains achieved through the response are sustainable beyond the crisis phase. Evaluation findings converge to show that the inclusion of local capacity into the relief, recovery and reconstruction phase increases the likelihood of longer-term positive effects. For example, data from the IA RTE Haiti demonstrates that where local capacity existed and was involved in the response, positive results were observed.⁴⁸

47. However, OCHA 2010 evaluations unanimously conclude that participation of national actors or affected populations in the humanitarian response has been extremely limited.
48. Despite the potential of the cluster approach to strengthen ownership by enhancing interactions between humanitarian actors and government authorities and by including national and local NGOs to reinforce their partnerships, evaluations conclude that clusters have largely failed to integrate national and local actors appropriately and have thereby undermined national ownership. Efforts to strengthen ownership have been made, but with limited success. Lead organizations of response clusters have the responsibility to ensure utilization of participatory and community based approaches in sectoral needs assessment, analysis, planning, monitoring and response. However, except for some very notable positive examples, clusters have not been active or effective in strengthening participatory approaches, either by promoting community based approaches among their members, or through including affected populations in their own activities.⁴⁹
49. Similarly, and despite the overall commitment to “build back better”, the Haiti Evaluation concludes that in the response to the earthquake crisis, “most clusters worked almost to the exclusion of the Government in their deliberations and planning”⁵⁰. Moreover, the Haiti RTE evaluation identifies some negative side effects of the humanitarian response to the crises that could have been avoided by ensuring the inclusion of affected population and local actors in the planning of the response. For example, the (necessary) provision of free services (e.g. health, education, water) had a harmful impact on the highly privatized Haitian economy. There was also the risk that participants in cash for work programs were stigmatized due to the colorful t-shirts they had to wear, and that government legitimacy was undermined because programs were branded with agency names instead of with the logo of the respective ministry. Cash for work programs implemented for debris removal could not be used to clear private land, which forced people to clear these at night, creating unnecessary dangers and inefficiencies.⁵¹
50. The PSEA Evaluation also reflects the distancing of humanitarian response from the affected populations. At field level, agencies (with a few exceptions) do not have community awareness-raising programmes on SEA, or mechanisms to channel community

⁴⁸ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, page 41.

⁴⁹ Evaluation of the Cluster Approach 2 - Synthesis Report, recommendation 1.2, page 79.

⁵⁰ Evaluation of OCHA Emergency Response to the Haiti Earthquake, page 32.

⁵¹ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, pages 41 and 42.

complaints through which SEA complaints can be made. Without these, protecting affected populations from abuse of power by those who have gained that power through employment by, or in association with, the humanitarian sector will be very difficult.⁵²

51. OCHA 2010 evaluations identified a number of reasons for the prevalent failure to use or promote participatory approaches in the design and implementation of humanitarian response. These are included in the box below.

Box 3: CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

- Initial assessments do not include analysis of local capacities, which may lead to the assumption that there is no local capacity.
- The lack of contextual and language knowledge of most humanitarian actors makes communication with the affected population and local authorities difficult. The lack of communication with the government and the heterogeneity of civil society adds to these difficulties.
- Difficulties to access local areas for security reasons, and restrictions imposed to humanitarian personnel by security organizations hamper contact with the population.
- Participatory approaches are sometimes seen as time-consuming and therefore often not deemed practical in emergency situations.
- Most cluster activities, such as information sharing, technical discussions and the preparation of appeals, do not readily lend themselves to participatory approaches.
- Clusters are mostly led by UN agencies. Many UN agencies are not operational, but work through NGO implementing partners. As a result, they often have little presence in the field and little direct interaction with beneficiaries.

52. To overcome these problems and ensure the provision of more effective emergency response in the future, evaluations unanimously recommend ensuring the inclusion of local capacity and the affected population in relief efforts, and emphasize that improving communication with authorities, local actors and the affected population is a first crucial step towards more inclusive humanitarian assistance.⁵³ Having humanitarian agencies and NGOs revise their security restrictions to allow staff to circulate and make contact with the local population, and creating professional crisis communication systems that help humanitarians deliver results in relation to realistic rather than exaggerated expectations may also be helpful steps in this regard.⁵⁴

53. Within the cluster approach, evaluations suggest that cluster lead agencies with their strategic groups and the inter-cluster hold special meetings to analyze the negative side effects of the response in the respective sectors, and develop common mitigation strategies. Similarly, Early Recovery Clusters and donors should hold sessions of this kind to analyze

⁵² Review of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), para. 188.

⁵³ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, para. 137, page 61; see also para. 124, page 58.

⁵⁴ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, para. 125, page 58.

the impact of health and cash for work programs on the reputation of the government and on marginalized groups of population.⁵⁵

III. CONCLUSIONS

54. Recurring issues highlighted by OCHA 2010 evaluations are not new. Some of these themes had already been identified in evaluations of past emergency responses, and the humanitarian system is taking steps to address them. While progress has been made in many areas, such as humanitarian financing, the establishment of the cluster system, and the growing positive impact of the response reported in OCHA 2010 evaluations, OCHA will continue work to address these issues, and strive for improving the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of humanitarian response to crises.

⁵⁵ IA RTE in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, para. 126, page 58.