



Good Practices in Humanitarian Assistance: Zimbabwe

The Good Practice Paper series of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project* aims to highlight examples of practices identified within the project's four focus countries (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe), that contribute to effective implementation of the humanitarian reform agenda. The purpose of the papers is not to address problems nor do they necessarily capture the whole picture. They are not intended to make definitive recommendations.

Background

A key challenge that has emerged in terms of adherence to the Principles of Partnerships (PoP)¹ in the humanitarian reform process concerns involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially national and local NGOs, in the strategic decision-making processes of clusters, including resource allocation. Clusters² have tried to address these challenges by setting up *ad hoc* peer review groups involving NGOs to review the proposals submitted by cluster members for consideration under pooled humanitarian financing. Clusters have also been taking initiatives to set in place mechanisms that would involve NGOs in other strategic decision-making processes, such as setting yearly priorities, reviewing cluster performance, etc.

In order to address the need to involve NGOs in strategic decision-making processes, some clusters in Zimbabwe have set up cluster steering committees or advisory groups. These groups usually include NGO representatives, donors, government representatives and agencies that are leading or co-leading clusters. The mandate of these groups includes, but is not limited to: reviewing funding proposals submitted by cluster members; advocacy with donors for increased funding on behalf of the cluster; providing technical guidance to cluster members; helping the cluster to identify and set up performance standards, etc.

This paper, which forms part of the series of Good Practice Papers produced by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, focuses on the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) of the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster in Zimbabwe. The paper highlights the SAG as an example of good practice that demonstrates ways in which NGOs, including local and national NGOs, can be included in the strategic decision-making processes of the cluster, demonstrating the PoP spirit of partnership.

Context

The origin of the WASH Cluster SAG in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the 'Crisis Task Force' that was established in the second half of 2008. This was set up to address the need for a smaller and more strategic group providing the cluster with an effective means of planning and strategising for

emergency response and preparedness. The need arose in part because of the large and diverse size of the WASH Cluster membership. On average, up to 100 agencies and individuals participate in monthly WASH Cluster meetings. NGO cluster members appreciate the diverse and vast nature of the WASH Cluster and support the SAG as a small group of dedicated cluster members who are willing to help the cluster narrow down its strategies and make decisions.

The increase in donor support to the 2008/09 cholera crisis in Zimbabwe brought the WASH Cluster to the forefront of emergency response work. The cluster responded by transforming and expanding its Crisis Task Force into the 'Strategic Advisory Group'. This was specifically to assist with assessment and recommendation of WASH Cluster members' proposals for funding to UNICEF.³ At that time, the membership criteria of the SAG was not clearly defined, although key international NGOs with a track record in WASH activities were included. Since that time, the mandate of the SAG has been evolving to reflect the changing situation with regard to the WASH activities in the country. The group has also undergone broad changes in terms of representation/membership, as well as the need to address issues such as changing expectations of the group's members, a realisation of the need for mutual accountability, and accountability to the communities and other stakeholders.

The relatively calm phase after the peak of the cholera outbreak (post-July 2009) provided an opportunity for the group to reflect on its work and brainstorm about the changes that it needed to undergo. The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project accelerated this process of review and reflection about the SAG's role, composition and mandate by raising these issues with the cluster coordinator and the co-lead.

The current members of the SAG include: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as cluster lead; Oxfam GB as cluster co-lead; European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) as donor representative; Ministry of Water as government representative; Action Contre la Faim (ACF); International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); German Agro Action (GAA); International Medical Corps (IMC) as international NGO representatives; Zimbabwe Ahead and PENYA Trust as national NGO representatives.

Objectives

As well as the international NGOs, the SAG of the WASH Cluster includes national and local NGOs that were previously marginalised from the decision-making processes in Zimbabwe. According to the terms of reference adopted by the WASH Cluster, the key objectives of the SAG include:

- Mobilising resources (funds) for WASH activities, reviewing proposals submitted by cluster members and making recommendations to funding agencies regarding equitable and transparent allocations.
- Providing strategic and technical guidance to the cluster and, where appropriate, making policy recommendations.
- Reviewing and analysing the WASH cluster's response plan and, drawing from lessons learnt, developing key aspects of recovery and preparedness.

¹ The Principles of Partnership (PoP) are: equality; transparency; result-oriented approach; responsibility; complementarity. See www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org. See also Understanding and experiences of humanitarian reform process in Zimbabwe – A short analysis; The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, January 2010.

² For more information on the Clusters Approach see <http://www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=70>

³ UNICEF as the cluster lead for WASH had received pooled financial contributions from donors on behalf of the cluster.

- Setting performance standards and indicators for WASH emergency response and cross-cutting issues such as accountability, gender, and HIV and AIDS.
- Developing an action plan and monitoring the same through the commissioning of impact assessments and cluster-wide reviews.
- Carrying out a yearly review of the cluster's performance among its members and facilitating the process for the cluster to act upon the findings.

Evidence of Success and Impact

This paper's conclusions about the good practices of the WASH SAG are based on the assumption that an ideal cluster governance mechanism is in accordance with the PoPs. In other words, it involves NGOs, particularly local and national NGOs, in decision-making processes; it promotes transparency in resource allocation; it involves NGOs in setting strategic priorities; and it facilitates an effective response from the cluster during crisis.

Operationalising POPs:

The SAG has taken the lead in encouraging local and national NGOs to participate in decision-making and strategic processes of the cluster by adopting a proportional quota (based on size of cluster membership) for NGOs on the SAG. Currently the quota provides six seats to international NGOs, three to national NGOs, and one each to donors, government and UNICEF. These changes demonstrate the commitment of the SAG and WASH Cluster to operationalising PoPs, especially those related to equality, transparency and complementarity. Creating the SAG has also proved to go deeper than just having an NGO co-lead as a model for promoting NGO participation in cluster decision-making. The SAG also gives a concrete way forward for engaging government and donors in the functioning of the cluster beyond policy compliance and provision of funds.

Transparency in resource allocation:

The involvement of the SAG in reviewing project proposals under Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has introduced greater transparency in the functioning of the cluster. The SAG has been instrumental in helping the cluster to set strategic priorities, particularly in relation to allocations for various pooled funding mechanisms such as CAP, CERF and cholera non-food items (NFI) distribution. Under CAP 2010, the SAG reviewed all the proposals submitted by the cluster members. The CAP 2010 had pre-defined criteria provided by OCHA to clusters for the selection of projects submitted by agencies. A printout of all the projects was made available to SAG participants (usually about a page for each proposal). In the SAG meeting, each proposal was scored according to the criteria. Comments from the SAG members on the proposal were also documented. Any member of the SAG whose project was under review temporarily stepped out of the meeting. The SAG also changes the priority (low, medium and high) accorded to the proposals if the agency that submitted the proposal is able to address the comments made by the SAG and submits a revised proposal. The decision for upward modification of the priority of proposals submitted by the cluster lead and co-lead is only made based on the recommendation of at least two SAG members that are not involved in the proposed project.

Strategic priorities:

The SAG has also been instrumental in identifying and supporting new initiatives towards making the cluster and its work more effective through decentralisation. The SAG has helped the cluster to set up sub-national level clusters and smaller technical working groups. Currently six sub-national level clusters and six technical working groups exist at national level in Zimbabwe. The sub-national level clusters are mostly coordinated by the NGOs that are members of the SAG. These sub-national clusters provide coordination services at provincial level and promote the participation of provincial authorities and local NGOs that do not have any presence in Harare. These groups and sub-clusters have helped the cluster to bring its functioning in line with the result-oriented approach and complementarity principles enshrined in the PoP.

In order to improve the participation of local and national NGOs in clusters and to encourage them as equal partners, the SAG discussed and lent support to the idea of initiating structured capacity-building initiatives for national and local NGOs. For example, an inter-cluster workshop was organised recently by the WASH Cluster to explore the specific capacity-building needs of the national and local NGOs. The workshop developed some recommendations of key priorities for capacity building and a small working group under the leadership of OCHA has been set up to drive forward the process for implementing these recommendations. The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project has been advocating for local NGO capacity building at cluster level. The project's Humanitarian Reform Officer attended the workshop and is part of the capacity-building working group.

Performance standards and review:

For the week ending 31 January 2010, the cholera cases reported in the past year were 0.3% compared to the previous year, whilst the deaths were 0.2% compared to the previous year. The 2010 cholera case fatality rate was lower than the previous year's by 1.9%, although it was still higher than the recommended 1% threshold.⁴ This decrease in the number of cholera incidents can be attributed to numerous factors, as highlighted in several documents including the 2010 Zimbabwe CAP and the cholera response lessons learned workshop report.

The SAG also initiated and guided the cholera response evaluation carried out by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development (IWSD). In addition, a workshop involving WASH Cluster members was also organised to review the cholera response. Although there has not been a linear study to show the linkages between the improved functioning of the WASH Cluster and the decrease in the cholera crisis, the studies have identified improvements in humanitarian response and coordination. The Zimbabwe mapping study carried out by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project in early 2009 also suggested that the WASH Cluster has been working well.⁵ This improved coordination and response can in part be attributed to the leadership shown by the SAG. The SAG also came up with the idea of establishing a WASH emergency response unit supported by ECHO that endeavors to provide rapid response to communities suspected of being affected by cholera.

⁴ Epidemiological bulletin number 44. Week 4 (week ending 31 January 2010); WHO, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. (2009).

⁵ Mapping study – Zimbabwe report (2009); NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (see www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html).

Conclusion

Given, the way in which NGOs, especially national and local NGOs, feel left out of the strategic decision-making processes of clusters, including resource allocation, the introduction of mechanisms such as the SAG are a welcome development. The WASH SAG in Zimbabwe has demonstrated how principles of partnership can be operationalised by giving proportional representation to NGOs on decision-making forums. The SAG now needs to capitalise on its reformed architecture by addressing some ways forward.

Currently, the sitting members of the SAG decide who to take into the SAG when spaces arise. The entry mechanism needs to be improved. SAG members should have fixed tenure and, instead of continuing with the current set of members as it is, the larger cluster membership should be given the opportunity to identify who they would like to sit on the SAG as their representatives. The cluster members should be encouraged to vote for the SAG membership if there are more candidates than available slots.

The SAG has also demonstrated that transparency in resource allocation can be achieved and assistance to the communities in crisis can be improved through the adoption of participatory consultation and decision-making processes. However, the SAG needs to improve on its feedback mechanism to the NGOs whose project proposals are rejected. It also needs to improve the ways in which smaller international NGOs and national NGOs could be supported to avail financial resources through the cluster without compromising the needs of the communities it is meant to serve. The SAG also needs to improve information sharing with larger clusters, particularly about how it makes decisions, what issues are discussed in its meetings and the subsequent decision-making processes. Regular and timely circulation of the meeting minutes of the SAG to the larger group will address this and further boost the confidence of cluster members in the SAG.

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