The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

A chance to influence the humanitarian system

Understanding and experiences of humanitarian reform process in Zimbabwe – A short analysis

Abstract:

The Humanitarian reform process started in Zimbabwe in 2007 with the proposal for introduction of clusters. Significant progress has been made since the 2007 and particularly in the last few months where cluster lead agencies have hired full time cluster coordinators and regular dialogue between the actors is taking place. But the progress made so far is patchy and there is a need to identify the gaps and address them so that the whole reform process could reach its maximum potential and bring meaningful changes in the lives of the communities in crisis. There is a need for NGOs particularly the smaller international NGOs (INGOs) and national NGOs (NNGOs) to be made aware about the whole reform process and the principles behind it so that they are able to participate in a meaningful manner as equal partners. There is also a need to revisit the issues related to NGO co-leadership, resource allocation and decision making processes so that cluster members do feel that there is something for them in it. The issue of downward accountability to the communities and to the NGOs within the cluster requires attention. The Cluster system as a whole should be accountable to the communities in crisis for whose benefit, supposedly, these reforms were initiated in the first place.

Introduction:

In early 2004, frustrated by the inadequacy of the international response to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan, Jan Egeland (UN Emergency Relief Coordinator at the time) commissioned the Humanitarian Response Review. The objective of this review was to develop ‰a joint plan of action to improve the effectiveness and timeliness of the humanitarian response to emergencies+. The Humanitarian Response review (Adinolfi. C, et al; 2005) made 36 recommendations for reform at the international level, some of which were incorporated into the UN-led humanitarian reforms three original ±pillarsq Partnership was added subsequently on.

When the reforms were originally conceived, they were intended to be mutually supporting. This interrelationship between the different aspects of the humanitarian reform suggests that they are best visualised not as the pillars of a classical building, but rather as spokes of a chariot-wheel[1].

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[1] The three spokes of the reform are funding, coordination (clusters) and leadership, resting on the hub of donor support. The consortium believes that that for the reform to actually work towards providing more effective humanitarian responses, other 'missing' parts, such as greater accountability to crisis-affected communities must be included. The whole reform can only be held together through the steel band of partnership running around the wheel.
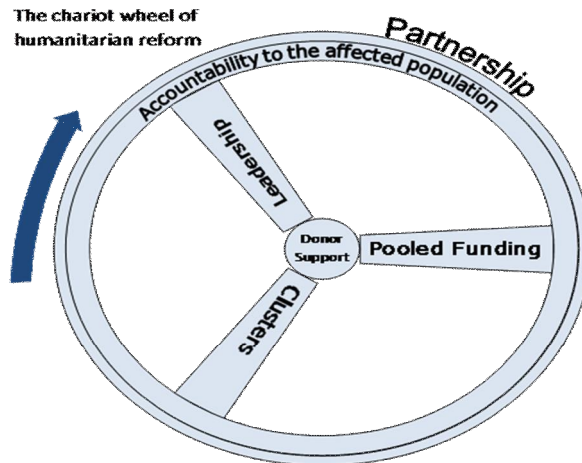
Figure : The chariot-wheel of humanitarian reform

In Zimbabwe, the reform process was initiated in 2007 with workshops organised on humanitarian reform and on principles of partnerships (POPs)[2] in January and June 2007, respectively. Currently 9 global clusters are operational in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is the third largest recipient of CERF funds in 2009 though most of the money it has received is from the underfunded window. The UN Resident Coordinator (RC) also performs the role of Humanitarian Coordinator (HC).

The current paper builds up on the Zimbabwe mapping study and the synthesis report that were commissioned by the NGOs and humanitarian reform project.[3] The paper compliments the findings of these research reports and provides fresh information from the field. The paper analyses the understanding and experiences of NGOs and cluster coordinators about the ongoing humanitarian reform process on the basis of a small survey involving 5 international NGOs (INGOs), 4 national NGOs (NNGOs) and 5 cluster coordinators.

The aim of this paper is to capture a snapshot of the understanding and experiences of the humanitarian actors viz. humanitarian reform process, identify the areas where progress is weak, identify the challenges faced by the actors and make suggestions on how these issues could be addressed. The target audience of the paper include NGOs, UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN cluster coordinators and lead agencies & donors. The paper provides information for the actors to carry out relevant advocacy and also to undertake measures to strengthen the reform process in Zimbabwe.

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[2] They include equality, transparency, result oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity.

[3] NGOs and Humanitarian Reform is a 3 year NGO consortium project funded by DFID. Member agencies are ActionAid, CAFOD, Care International UK, ICVA, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html <http://www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitariamreform.html>

Methodology:

The paper is based on the survey conducted by the NGOs and Humanitarian reform project involving 5 INGOs, 4 NNGOs and 5 cluster coordinators[4]. The survey tool was developed by the project team and the author carried out interviews with the stakeholders in Harare in last quarter of 2009. The objectives of the paper are:

1. To capture a snapshot of the understanding and experiences of the humanitarian actors viz. humanitarian reform process,
2. To identify the areas where progress is weak,
3. To identify the challenges faced by the actors, and
4. To make suggestions of how these issues could be addressed.

The survey covered respondentsqperception of application and adherence to principles of partnership including financial transparency, cluster co-leadership, common needs assessments, consultation with communities and downward accountability.

The findings of the survey are indicative in nature and do not claim to be fully representing the views of humanitarian community in Zimbabwe. But they do provide a clear picture of the situation on the ground and reiterate messages, many humanitarian actors are already aware of, with fresh evidence.

Perceptions of the application and adherence to the Principles of Partnership

Basic understanding:

There is a general basic understanding amongst NGOs about the whole humanitarian reform process. 6 out of 9 NGO respondents including 2 NNGOs had heard about humanitarian reforms. Of the key aspects of the humanitarian reform as presented above, respondents were most familiar with cluster system followed by financing and leadership. 4 respondents had heard about partnership but only 1 NNGO amongst them. This number corresponds with the respondents who knew about principles of partnership (POPs). The low number of respondents claiming to be aware of the POPs and the partnership rim of the humanitarian reform chariot wheel is unfortunate considering that UN rolled out reform process in 2007 in Zimbabwe and the country has just emerged from a cholera outbreak. *It is pertinent that UN OCHA works with clusters and NGO groups/federations to organise regular workshops to familiarize NGO partners about the POPs and other aspects of the 'why and how' of reform process.*

Amongst the cluster coordinators the understanding of POPs was found to be satisfactory. All cluster coordinators claimed to be following the principles in their work. They cited

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[4] INGOs interviewed include Plan International, ACF, GOAL, German agro action & Concern worldwide. NNGOs interviewed include Environment Africa, Christian Care, Farms orphan support trust (FOST) & Childline. Clusters interviewed include WASH, Health, Agriculture, Nutrition & Protection.

Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) prioritisation process, the setting up of cluster steering committees/advisory groups with NGO representation & carrying out periodic reviews of the cluster work with its members as examples to show their adherence to POPs such as transparency and equality. NGO respondents to the survey disagreed with the cluster leads in their assessment of adherence to the Principles of Partnership. On the scale of 1 . 5, with 1 being following very little and 5 being following completely, NGOs scored them 1.8. NGOs identified issues such as UN not sharing their staff and administration cost with partners, UN agencies dictating methodology and areas of intervention without consulting with NGOs. NGOs also cited some positive examples where they think that cluster leads have adhered to POPs, for example, setting up of cluster steering committees, renewed outreach towards NNGOs by some cluster leads, identification of projects for Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and developing the current CERF application and sharing of funding information/opportunities.

Two out of five cluster coordinators, protection and health, have not received any training or orientation about humanitarian reforms or POPs[5]. This highlights the need for global cluster lead agencies to organise at regular intervals such training and orientation programmes. Sessions on humanitarian reform process should be part of the pre deployment trainings.

All NGOs and cluster coordinators considered POPs as a useful tool to promote equality, transparency and partnership between humanitarian actors. No cluster coordinator except health have experienced positive change in their work by following POPs, this is mainly because the health cluster coordinator noted that her previous employer had limited stress on the spirit of partnership with other stakeholders operating in the area. The POPs helped her to un learn the previous practice and adopt the new approach. Meanwhile, other cluster coordinators saw POPs as "basic practice in humanitarian and development work", which they have learned and followed over the years. NGOs gave example of their use of POPs by pointing to the discussions that took place in Humanitarian country team (HCT) meeting where NGO participants advocated for setting up of an inclusive Emergency Response Fund (ERF) board by reminding others of the POPs.

The survey also found scope for NGOs to familiarise their in country staff about POPs as none of the NGOs interviewed had organised any in house orientation for their staff on POPs and POPs don't appear on any materials/manuals developed by them.

Participation of NGOs

Participation of NGOs particularly NNGOs as equal partners in clusters and other aspects of reforms has been less than satisfactory. Though 6 respondents claimed that cluster coordinators have made extra efforts to bring in NGOs especially NNGOs, none of the NNGOs reported feeling that they participate as "equals" in these meetings. All NNGOs but one reported that their participation in clusters is limited to discussions in the meeting. They claimed to be playing no role in decision making, giving strategic inputs and most importantly in resource allocation. This figure was better amongst INGOs as three of them were participating in decision making and resource allocation forums of the cluster. *However, it is*

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[5] It was reported that incoming health cluster coordinator has received relevant training organized by global health cluster.

noticeable that the participation of NGO representatives gets reduced when resource allocations (CERF) are negotiated at Inter cluster forum for final recommendations to be considered by the HCT and HC.

Certainly not all NGOs members of a cluster can be included in decision making and resource allocation processes considering the high number of participants in cluster meetings. Nevertheless, there is definitely case for giving more space to the representatives of NNGOs on these forums.

Cluster coordinators reported to be making full efforts to promote active participation of NGOs in the clusters through outreach, sending out invitations and making attempts to involve NGOs in decision making process. One of the cluster coordinator acknowledged that not all NGOs are able to participate in cluster process as the meetings are held in Harare only. *This suggests the need for OCHA to work with UN and government agencies to roll out clusters or strengthen other coordination structures at regional and provincial levels.*

Clusters have also been maintaining close links with relevant government authorities, who have been participating in cluster meetings and are also represented on various decision making bodies within the cluster. Participation of government authorities was appreciated by all stakeholders.

All clusters reported to be organising or planning to organise technical and sector specific trainings for cluster members. The WASH cluster, which received a lot of donor support and attention during the cholera outbreak is leading amongst the clusters for organising trainings[6]. I/NGOs expressed satisfaction with the efforts made by their cluster leads in organising trainings and expressed their willingness to send staff members to such trainings in future.

Transparency in resource allocation

Transparency and accountability particularly in resource allocation and decision making is very important. Clusters are using various mechanisms and practises to ensure that decisions made with regard to CERF and CAP are transparent. Some clusters disseminate criteria for funding before the call for proposals, involve their cluster steering committees or advisory groups in reviewing proposals and in making recommendations for funding. Some clusters that don't have a steering committee or advisory group elect a peer review group amongst the cluster members.

Under the CAP all clusters used current or identified peer review groups to review the proposals submitted. Based on the recommendations of the group the proposals were either accepted or rejected. The review group also prioritised the proposals based on the pre-identified criteria that was given to the clusters by OCHA.

While it is important to point out that there has been considerable progress made in promoting transparency and accountability in resource allocation and decision making there are still many concerns and lack of clarity amongst NGOs. For example, there are concerns

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[6] Protection and Nutrition are the only clusters that haven't organized any training yet though they plan to do it in future.

amongst the NGOs especially NNGOs about the composition of these cluster steering committees/review groups . how NGOs are being included, are there NNGOs & how many of them, how long are they going to be on the steering committee, what is the mandate of these committees-; NGOs are also concerned about not always receiving adequate and timely feedback on their rejected proposals (this concern has been shared by some cluster leads as well). Further, there are no standard guidelines provided to the cluster leads to organise consultations and make decisions in their clusters that uphold POPs; the time taken by individual UN agencies to disburse CERF money onwards to NGOs is also a concern as on average NGOs had to wait 1.5-2 months to receive money after the final decision about funding has been made.

Cluster co-lead

Oxfam GB and Save the Children are the NGO co-leads for WASH and education clusters, respectively. UNICEF is currently in the process of hiring a dedicated education cluster coordinator and therefore education cluster was not included in the survey. Oxfam GB has been the co-lead for WASH cluster since January 2009. There is a TOR for the co-lead and the cluster coordinator believes that having a co-lead is extremely beneficial as it increases transparency, brings in a different perspective, provides access to additional technical resources and improves a collaborative approach. Oxfam is receiving financial support from donors to enable its WASH advisor to give a percentage of her time for cluster related activities. Such support has also been proposed under the 2010 CAP projects.

Apart from WASH and education other clusters interviewed do not have NGO co-. leads and have not been actively looking for NGO co-leads either. The justification for not having a co-lead includes clusters having full time coordinators, clusters having a steering committee and no discussion within the cluster where NGOs have raised the issue of co-lead. In the health cluster one NGO has expressed interest to be a co-lead and the new incoming health cluster coordinator may facilitate an open discussion in cluster meetings about the need for having a NGO co-lead. If the cluster members consider that there is a need for a co-lead then the cluster coordinator will ask NGOs to express their interest and initiate the required process. *It might be beneficial for other clusters to follow suit and organise such discussions within the cluster about need for having a NGO co-lead.*

None of the NGOs interviewed for the survey are co-leads or have tried to be co-leads for any cluster. NGOs cited lack of resources . financial and human . as the main reason for them to not actively pursue this as well as lack of support from donors to carry out this function. NGOs particularly the NNGOs also expressed their perception that cluster lead agencies are powerful and that they control resources and that it is a structure (clusters) controlled from the top with NGOs having no say in the process. This perception again corresponds with the limited understanding of NNGOs about humanitarian reform process and POPs. It further highlights the need for cluster coordinators to continue providing more clarity on their position and transparency in decision making and resource allocation.

Common needs assessment:

Of the 5 clusters interviewed only WASH has developed a common needs assessment framework for its work. The framework has been developed by the global cluster and has been adapted locally. The cluster has also carried out trainings for its members to use the

frameworks but the follow up rate is low because the framework is new. Other clusters use existing information mechanisms such as surveys conducted by various agencies and reports generated by UN, government and NGOs to assess the needs on the ground within their sector. Out of 9 NGOs interviewed which are members of the WASH cluster only 1, an INGO, has been using the assessment developed by WASH cluster.

NGOs recognise the relevance of common needs assessment (CANs) as they think it will standardise information and help in developing common indicators, it will avoid reinventing the wheel and duplication and improve timeliness of action, it can help develop common understanding of the issues and avoid disputes about the data. But NGOs also want these CNAs to be developed in consultation with them, where they could present their own methodologies for consideration and adoption. They want CNAs to be developed in a spirit of equality so that the whole cluster buys in before using them.

Downward accountability:

All stakeholders claimed to be consulting with the communities. NGOs use a variety of measures such as individual interviews, focus group discussion, PRA tools, etc for consulting with the communities. Clusters largely depend on information provided by NGO or surveys carried out by government bodies. Some clusters have initiated joint assessments or surveys to consult with the communities. Nevertheless, NGOs believe that views of crisis affected communities are hardly taken into consideration in the clusters that they participate in[7]. Even the cluster coordinators feel that views of crisis affected communities need to be further taken into consideration. Cluster coordinators desire that NGOs and UN agencies participating in cluster activities are incorporating the views of the affected communities but there is no mechanism or practise to check if agencies are actually doing it on the ground. Cluster coordinators did identify it as an area of improvement.

None of the clusters have an agreed definition and understanding of downward accountability. NGOs were also found to have a varying levels of understanding about downward accountability with views ranging from "interventions that promote bottom up rights based approach, taking into account what people want" to "ensuring that resources are being used to the best concerns of the community and organisational values of the NGO". NGOs have taken initiatives and have set up mechanisms to ensure this by using PRA tools for developing community development plans and using the same tools to carry out community reviews to evaluate work done; by developing community based complaints mechanisms; by inviting communities for annual meetings of their organisation; by carrying out follow up visits and consultations with excluded groups in the community and by organising stakeholder meetings at the launch, during and after the project.

Downward accountability to communities is one area where a lot of work still needs to be done. *To begin with clusters may try and develop a common understanding amongst stakeholders about what they mean about being accountable to the communities.* NGOs and agencies with a track record in promoting downward accountability could be requested to help the clusters in this regard. Clusters may also adopt mechanisms and practises that NGOs have developed over the years to ensure that they are being accountable to the people in the community.

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[7] On the ascending scale of 1 to 5 NGOs rated this at 1.4

Within the clusters accountability towards cluster members also needs to be ensured. WASH is the only cluster that claims to have a complaints mechanism in place, where a dissatisfied member could come and complain to the cluster lead. The current practise in the agriculture cluster of carrying out an annual review through anonymous questionnaire amongst cluster members is a unique and transparent way of ensuring accountability within the cluster. *OCHA should encourage other clusters to follow suit and help them in developing tools and techniques that would help the clusters in promoting transparency and accountability within the cluster.*

Conclusions and way forward:

The survey provides a glimpse of some aspects of progress on implementation of humanitarian reform in Zimbabwe. There has been significant progress made in the past few months but as has been discussed above this progress has been patchy and there are number of issues that need the attention of the humanitarian community. Although many of these are not new, they do need a renewed effort from the humanitarian community to address them and resolve in the spirit of partnership.

- ***There is an urgent need to familiarise the NGO community about 'whys and whats' of humanitarian reform in a more systematic and structured manner***. Particular attention has to be paid on NNGOs and smaller INGOs who attend the clusters (the most visible aspect of reforms) but do not really seem to be benefiting much out of it. Such awareness should be both at the senior management level and amongst the staff members participating in cluster. UN OCHA should work with clusters and NGO groups/federations to develop a yearly calendar for such workshops.

- ***In order to further enhance participation of NGOs in the process, there is need to roll out clusters in the provinces or strengthen other coordination mechanisms***, WASH has made some progress in this regard by identifying agencies (primarily NGOs) that are willing to take the lead in provinces. There is a need to ensure more support for such agencies to make sure that they are able to perform their job satisfactorily and that they dont feel 'burned out' after some time in the absence of any support for them.

- ***There is need for more transparent systems to be set up at cluster levels for resource allocation and decision making.*** Such systems should not only be transparent (as some of them are currently) but they also need to be in line with the partnership principle of equality.

- ***There is a need to set up in country CERF review board on lines of ERF advisory board***, involving NGO partners along with UN agencies to advice the HCT and HC on CERF related funding decisions.

- ***Standard operating procedures should be developed and followed by UN agencies with support from OCHA and CERF secretariat to disburse money onwards to NGOs.***

- ***The issue of NGO co-lead should be discussed in all clusters that don't have a co-lead to analyse whether the cluster members feel a need for it.*** If such need is expressed then the cluster lead should work towards facilitating the identification/election/nomination of the NGO co-lead in accordance to the POPs.

- ***Clusters should develop a common understanding about accountability especially downward accountability to the beneficiaries.*** NGOs and agencies with a track record in promoting downward accountability should support the clusters in this regard.

- ***OCHA should encourage clusters to develop and carry out performance reviews and develop complaints mechanisms that are based on POPs.***

- ***A review workshop should be organised in the near future to see where we have reached since the launch of reforms*** in the country and what more needs to be done to bring the reform process more in line with the principles of partnership and something that actually has an impact in saving lives and protecting rights of the people in crisis.

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international humanitarian NGOs in reformed humanitarian financing and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels. The project, which is funded by DfID, aims to fortify the voices of NGOs in influencing policy debates and field processes related to humanitarian reform and to propose solutions so that humanitarian response can better meet the needs of affected populations.

A consortium of six NGOs are part of the project – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children, together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

The project runs for three years until October 2011.

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