

Emergency Shelter Cluster Consultation Project

Survey Findings January- March 2008

Summary of results

The second round of the Consultation Project Survey has given a provided a useful forum for members of field based Emergency Shelter Clusters (ESCs) to air their opinions and comments. Twenty six responses were received from a broad range of agencies active in ten emergencies. Although an insignificant number to give a statistical representation the views shared offer a useful and valuable insight into the operational strengths and weaknesses of the ESC. It was both apparent that ESC was supported and deemed to be a valuable asset and that there were areas where the ESC could improve its service.

Respondents to the survey indicated that the ESC improved the humanitarian response of their organisation. All of the coordination methods used by the ESC were found to be useful. Respondents indicated the strengths of the ESC were primarily in providing information on the various activities undertaken in the group and in sharing technical advice. Areas of programme strategy development, contingency planing and liaison with government and donors were indicated as weaker. Strategy documents were found to be useful when they were produced and respondents asked for even more direction in designing their programmes. More prescriptive and detailed guidance were seen particularly by donors as areas where the ESC should focus.

Background

This survey is the second of its kind undertaken under the Global Consultation Project. It has aimed to collect feedback from the members of the ESC on the services offered inside the ESC and what may be needed for a more effective and efficient response. Results of the survey are shared with all members of the Global Emergency Shelter Cluster Working Group and are available on www.humanitarianreform.org.

This survey and all analysis have been carried out by the IFRC.

Method:

Consultation team members agreed on a set of questions to be asked to participants in field based ESCs. Questions were entered into an internet-based survey tool and the link was emailed to ESC listservs and other contacts for wide dissemination. Respondents were given six weeks to respond to the questionnaire and reminded after four weeks. Results were then analysed and interpreted.

Rational for the survey:

It was thought that a simple online survey could be a useful method of enabling a relatively quick transfer of experiences from the field to the global level. Survey questions were chosen to elicit feedback on the performance of the ESC and also enquire as to appropriate ways of developing the ESC in the future.

Recommendations

1. Develop shelter strategies early in a response and use these to influence agencies plans and donors funding decisions.
2. Provide more technical support to member agencies in the cluster to assist with implementation.
3. Maintain (IFRC)/initiate (UNHCR, UN Habitat) a separate secretariat for cluster coordination distinct from the programming arm of the organisation.
4. Maintain a strong focus on information sharing within field based ESCs.
5. Increase coordination of implementation with the WASH cluster to assist agencies implementing projects across the two clusters.
6. Actively look for opportunities to increase the interaction between the cluster and the host governments, particularly in information sharing and long term issues, such as land ownership.
7. Increase the information flow from the cluster to donors and request active donor participation in the cluster.
8. Maintain information management capacity in the ESC .
9. Include academic institutions from the host country in the ESC.
10. For future surveys, such as this, seek responses from local organisations to 'ground truth' the findings.

Comments from respondents

"The commitment of shelter cluster coordination team was apparent and their efforts - particularly in terms of establishing a clear overview of shelter needs - were much appreciated. Personally my main suggestion for shelter cluster leads (as well as other cluster leads) is that they need to take a more proactive role in terms of strategic leadership, both within their sector (ie advising donors and implementers on appropriate responses) and also within the management of the overall humanitarian response (advocating with UN, donors, gov and implementers to cover unmet needs). In Bangladesh the cluster suffered from a lack of strategic leadership on the part of the gov and UN resident coordinator, but probably could and should have pushed harder to demand this." International NGO respondent, Bangladesh.

"Temporary shelter provision should be linked to recovery, eg provide material that communities can use for permanent shelter as they move to resettlement areas. Explore possibilities of assisting people to learn to leave with floods, by providing shelter suitable for such an environment. Have more research on socio-cultural issues in shelter provision. More training on e.g sphere standards for various organisations that provide shelter." UN Respondent, Mozambique.

"I was only there for the first few weeks and did not attend cluster meetings. The clusters were not formally activated for most of the time I was there. This was an issue and clearly the speed at which they became operational was also an issue. I have been actively reading the website on return to the UK from Bangladesh and feel strongly that whilst the cluster was advocating for more donor support, programmes etc in shelter, there was absolutely NO mention of what was actually required in terms of materials, NFIs etc. This made it impossible for DFID as a donor to respond in a

suitable way as we need to rely on info from the clusters and involved organisations to (a) have a picture of the actual needs and (b) come to us and request funding for specific areas. This did not happen.” Donor respondent, Bangladesh.

“The cluster in Cyclone response was much stronger than what I’ve seen in Pakistan floods. More resources needed to achieve a strong SCG leading to ER in a combined effort from UN-INGOs-IFRC.

It should actively work with UNICEF for getting messages across the board for WATSAN issues.

It should actively work with IOM, Govt. Land ministry for the issue of landless. There should be a stronger landless strategy within SCG globally, in order to intervene in any future emergencies.

I hope this feedback is useful. It’s a good initiative.” International NGO respondent, Bangladesh.

Annex 1: Summary of Responses

Question 1: Name of Organisation

Question 2: Name of respondent

Question 3: Your role and position within the organisation

26 individuals from 18 Agencies responded

Question 4: Please choose one of the categories that best fits your organisation

Of a total of 26 responses 12 were from International NGO's (42%), 7 from UN Agencies (27%) and 3 from the Red Cross Movement (12%). Two donors contributed feedback and other responses came from independents and IOM.

Question 5: "Which emergency were you deployed to?"

Respondents related their experiences from 10 emergencies where the Emergency Shelter Cluster has been initiated. 11 of the 26 responses (40%) concerned experiences with the Bangladesh Emergency Shelter Cluster. Many related to the South Asia Earthquake in Pakistan (5,20%). Fewer concerned Emergency Shelter Clusters from other countries.

Question 6: Did the Emergency Shelter Cluster improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response of your organisation?

Overall respondents overwhelmingly noted improvements in the humanitarian response of their agencies due to their participation in the ESC. Concerning Bangladesh, six of the eight respondents listed 'some-' or 'significant improvements' to the effectiveness of the humanitarian response of their organisation due to participation in the ESC. Two respondents from Bangladesh noted that participation in the ESC had 'no effect'.

Significant improvement	Some improvement	No effect	Negative effect
11.1%	66.7%	22.2%	0.0%

Question 7: Are there ways the cluster lead/convenor in the field can improve its services? For example, technical support, staff deployment, information management tools, coordination functions, etc.

Respondents suggested that the ESC should provide stronger strategic leadership early on in the response. Respondents called for the ESC to be more prescriptive when suggesting shelter needs rather than just reporting on the variety of activities that agencies were undertaking. It was noted that better advice early on could have influenced NGOs programmes more.

Other responses supported a dedicated secretariat for the coordination team, distinct from the programming side of an agency, to avoid conflict of interest when it comes to applying for funding (NB: the IFRC provide dedicated coordination staff in natural disaster-type emergencies).

More technical support, a deeper field presence, better information management tools and public information in local languages were also requested.

Question 8: Were the different coordination methods useful in your view?

All of the coordination methods were ranked more useful than not useful. Particularly high scores were given to ESC meetings, meetings of the Technical Working Groups (TWIGs) and Strategic

Advisory Groups (SAGs) and the Googlegroups/email groups that are set up following a disaster. Ad hoc meetings, telephone conversations and individual meetings were all appreciated.

Question 9: Which stakeholders were missing from the coordination forum that you felt should have been there?

All ESCs were reported to be missing Government representatives and donors. Academic institutions and local NGOs were also deemed to be missing from the coordination forum by many respondents. Representation from the recipients of aid, such as union chairmen or village representatives were thought by some responders to be missing and needed.

Question 10: How were the national and local authorities included in the cluster's work? What could have been done better in this regard?

Several respondents indicated there should be better information flow between the cluster and the host government. The cluster should provide its plans and expectations and the host government providing information in areas such as land ownership.

Question 11: Were you aware of coordination or contact between the Emergency Shelter Cluster and other Clusters, for example, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Protection, etc.? Please comment on what you think is necessary or needs improvement.

Respondents generally noted a lack of coordination between clusters both in the planning stage and during implementation. The need for better coordination between WASH and the ESC was noted by many.

Question 12: Was your organisation requested to provide data, reports or information to the cluster? For example, distribution reports, details of programmes, planned activities, pipelines, etc.

Question 13: Were the requests for information appropriate? What types of information did you supply?

All respondents to this question who had an active programming role found that requests for information were appropriate. A wide range of information was requested by the cluster coordinator and shared with the cluster. This included needs assessment information, program updates, pipelines of stock, completion of 3w matrices, technical challenges and solutions and demographic information.

Question 14: How well did the Emergency Shelter Cluster support the following for your organisation?

Generally respondents answered that the support to their organisation was 'satisfactory'. The Cluster showed strength in providing 'understanding on the activities of other agencies' and 'providing and sharing technical advice'. The areas of 'programme strategy development', 'implementation' and 'contingency planning' were noted as areas of strength and weakness by equal numbers of respondents.

The areas of 'liaison and coordination with government, donors and non-cluster actors' were indicated predominantly as 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate'. Worst performance was observed in the area of 'resolving technical issues'.

Question 15: Did the Emergency Shelter Cluster develop and agree on a 'common shelter strategy' or 'Strategic Framework' to assist the planning of various agencies over time?

Question 16: Was this: Useful? Appropriate?, Representative?

Most respondents replied that a Shelter Strategic Framework was developed in the cluster. Results were unclear as to whether it was a useful and appropriate document or not: Some respondents noted it so and slightly fewer noted the opposite. Respondents generally viewed it as not representative.

Some respondents noted the difficulty of bringing together the responses in the emergency phase and the longer term recovery particularly among agencies with differing mandates.

Question 17: Did the Emergency Shelter Cluster develop and agree on 'common standards' for the shelter sector? For example, standards on quality, type of shelter intervention, distribution methodology, etc.

Answers to this question indicated that shelter strategies were produced by the ESC on some occasions but not every occasion. On the occasions where they were produced they were found to be useful. Some respondents indicated that they could be improved with more context information. It was also noted that the shelter strategy created a uniformity of interventions preventing harmful cross-NGO comparisons by the beneficiaries.

Question 18: Did your organisation apply the agreed standards?

In the cases where standards were agreed upon all respondents indicated that their organisation applied all of them or at least some of them.

Question 19: Are there additional comments, either positive or negative, that you wish to share regarding the Emergency Shelter Cluster?

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strongly that whilst the cluster was advocating for more donor support, programmes etc in shelter, there was absolutely NO mention of what was actually required in terms of materials, NFIs etc. This made it impossible for DFID as a donor to respond in a suitable way as we need to rely on info from the clusters and involved organisations to (a) have a picture of the actual needs and (b) come to us and request funding for specific areas. This did not happen.” Tanya Axisa, DFID CHASE OT, Bangladesh

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It should actively work with UNICEF for getting messages across the board for WATSAN issues.

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I hope this feed back is useful. It's a good initiative.” Rumana Kabir, Oxfam,

Question 20: What type of future follow-up, if any, is best suited to gather experience from emergencies where the Cluster Approach has been used?

In terms of follow up most respondents indicated that interviews in the field or a workshop in a regional hub would be the most effective means to get feedback on the operations of the ESC in the field. Phone and online surveys were supported also. There was a clear indication that future assessment of the cluster performance needs to be at field level.

Question 21: If you would be willing to be participate further in shaping future Emergency Shelter Cluster operations please supply your contact details.

11 of the 26 respondents indicated they could be contacted for further participation.