RT/EB: F. Sec Cluster Coordination in Humanitarian Action (2009-2014)

INTRO

- Following set up of the Cluster system in 2005 under the reforms to improve humanitarian system coordination & response, Food Security Cluster established in 2010 - co-led by FAO and WFP.
- Following the joint evaluation of the Logistics Cluster in 2012 (with UNICEF & Netherlands), the Cluster requested this evaluation (hence good engagement) to assess **whether the FSC is achieving its intended goals & deeper understanding of causal factors explaining results.**
- Evaluation commissioned in 2013 jointly by Evaluation Offices of Evaluation of WFP and FAO – reflecting the joint Lead Agency responsibilities.
- Also, 1st in OEV's Strategic Evaluation Series on Emergency Preparedness & Response. (Others covering PF and PREP to be presented in 2015).
- Mixed method approach based on the Cluster's logic including document review, 8 country case studies, survey administered in 43 countries, and interviews with close to 500 people.

KEY FINDINGS
The FSC's purpose is:
- to improve the capacity of humanitarian organizations to respond strategically and coherently, and
- to reduce gaps and duplications for improved services to affected populations.

1. OVERALL: overall finding reinforces those of related evaluations (e.g. Logistics Cluster and evaluation of UNICEFs cluster leadership) – i.e.:

- Effective coordination has a positive effect through humanitarian organisations being supported to achieve better results, but extent of benefits or results achieved depends on the capacity & commitment to support coordination by all actors involved - the humanitarian organisations themselves, donors, national governments & civil society organisations.

2. Positive effects found on organisations' performance that ultimately contributed to improved services through:
    - improving networking;
    - building mutual trust;
    - strengthening reporting;
    - in some cases, avoiding duplication and increasing coverage.

3.   HOWEVER, evaluation found most country-level coordination mechanisms did not sufficiently address the operational needs of their members, especially in:

- coordinating needs assessments
- identifying & filling response gaps
- using information to inform operations and learn from best practice
- enhancing contingency planning and preparedness.

4. Four main causal factors explain these results:

- **IASC coordination protocol and process demands on clusters are time intensive, excessive and take time away from support to operational effectiveness**
- **Limited inclusion and participation of governments, national & local organisations, and non-traditional actors** (in all case study countries except Kenya which has a Government-led food security coordination mechanism).
- **Variable commitment and capacity:**
  - The Global Support Team (GST) is making a commendable effort but has insufficient capacity to support all countries.
  - Lead agencies - clear corporate commitment, but at CO and RB level commitment more variable and in some cases problematic (e.g. lead agency not conforming to Cluster-agreed cash for work rates; contradictory positions on Appeal size requirements).
  - Inconsistent donor commitment. Strong evidence that where internationally-led food security mechanisms lack dedicated funding, clusters struggle to fulfill even basic cluster functions. Funding of predictable coordination costs is an issue of intense debate between agencies and donors - what this evaluation shows is that a solution has to be found in order that coordination can be ensured.
- **Insufficient clarity on roles responsibilities and boundaries in the coordination architecture,** especially regarding early recovery, livelihoods, C&V programming.

CONCLUSION:

- Food security coordination creates clear benefits for humanitarian organisations, contributing to increased service coverage.
- Investment seen as worthwhile, but constraints limit results & prevent reaching full potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations are oriented towards the grim operational reality facing the global humanitarian community today. With unprecedented number of L3 emergencies stretching available resources, effective coordination to ensure best possible overall emergency responses are more important than ever.

- 7 recommendations are made along with suggested action points to: lead agencies, the Global Support Team, and the coordination teams on the ground. Since coordination is reponsibility of all actors, the evaluation indirectly targets other cluster members, the IASC, OCHA, and donors.

  The recommendations call for:

  - commitment and capacity at regional, country and local levels requiring dedicated financial support;

  - greater host governments, national and local civil society involvement in coordination, especially important for recovery and preparedness;

  - Revision of standard system requirements, to enable greater focus on operationally-relevant activities

  - Clearer cross-cluster and multi-layer architecture arrangements, to support more efficient and effective coordination.