

- *What is the scale of humanitarian response in your sector?*

The provision of emergency shelter and NFIs assistance is a lifesaving activity that ensures human protection from elements while ensuring safety and dignity. In Afghanistan the ESNFI intervention included in the SRP2015 target 157,000 people in need with an estimated budget of USD 40 million. Major activities are the immediate provision of emergency shelter and NFIs, assessments, prepositioning of relief items and provision of technical support.

The ESNFI Cluster partners have been consistently responding in both natural disasters and conflict displacement with IOM and UNHCR being the leading relief Organizations. The unpredictability of displacement due to armed conflict has been posing a continue challenge on the response mechanisms. On the other hand, the response to recurrent and predictable natural disaster emergencies has been streamlined by preposition of essential NFIs and well disseminated assessment mechanisms. Shelter response has been reduced due to the limited availability of funds. There is still a non-assessed backlog of 2014's flood victims who may be in need of shelter support.

- *How many partners are delivering activities and what is the geographic spread – multiple partners responding to the same needs in the same places or equal distribution across the country?*

The majority of Cluster Partners are concentrated in the NR, NER, WR, ER, CR and CHR. In general, interventions are coordinated by the active regional clusters Kabul, Mazar, Herat and Jalalabad. The main Partners are also part of the Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM funded by ECHO) and their interventions are well coordinated. Due to the large size of emergency events requiring NFIs and shelter response, in most of the cases there are no overlaps but gaps due to the lack of relief response capacity of the GIRoA. In some cases, Cluster Partners developed standing arrangements for presentation of proposals and implementation of projects as they adhere to same technical standards and operational approaches.

- *What role is the cluster playing in coordinating these partners? Predominantly strategic planning or coordination of assessments, planning and response activities?*

The role of the ESNFI Cluster at the national level is to provide technical and coordination support. At the regional level, the clusters are more actively engaged in coordinating assessments, negotiating with authorities and monitoring implementation activities. In that sense, there is a complementarity of the two schemes of the coordination mechanisms.

- *Is there a dedicated government department/function related to your sector? Do they fulfill any coordination functions?*

At the National Level, discussions are ongoing with both MoRR and MoRRD taking into account the emergency characteristics of the ESNFI cluster. There are also talks with ANDMA and ARCS as being the relief responders from the Government side. Because of the political context, in most of the cases the assessments and responses to emergencies are directly handled by the PDMCs under direct supervision of Provincial Governments. The continue challenges are the misalignment of the different approaches, knowledge and agendas of each Provincial Governor. This is in particular evident and difficult to handle as each regional cluster covers more than one Province with dissimilar realities. Nevertheless, at the regional level there is more participative and cooperative attitude of ANDMA and relevant Ministerial representations. Generally, there is little knowledge of government Officials of the Cluster's roles and responsibilities as well as of the overall humanitarian architecture. ANDMA as the madated Government coordinating body for emergencies should to take a greater proactive role andbeing more engaged in the main coordination forums.

- *What other related coordination bodies exist dealing with your sector, even considering medium-long term/development actors (e.g. National Nutrition Committee / sector meetings)?*

In principle there is a clear overlapping with IDP Task forces as these newly developed mechanisms are designed to coordinate the overall response to IDP emergencies. The MoRR is in principle responsible for the coordination having a dedicated department at National level and being represented in Ad Hoc basis at the regional level in the event of an emergency. he IDP Policy is not fully operationalized, there is still confusion and misinterpretation of roles and responsibilities. This is evident while developing Contingency plans. The ESNFI Cluster has standardized CP that is in most of the cases adapted to each operation. The IDP Task force couldn't develop such plans without clear definition of roles and responsibilities.

Regarding the medium/long term/development actors, only on shelter response would be possible to find similar stakeholders where UNHABITAT and UNOPS are leading agencies coordinating with the GIRoA some small housing plans. There are as well bilateral assistance schemes (i.e. China or ECHO supported housing assistance).

Basically, the emergency nature of the ESNFI cluster has little to do with mid-term/development activities.

- *Does the cluster have a clear strategy in place outlining objectives and planned activities to deliver against the core functions?*

The cluster strategy has been developed recently and is still not finalized/approved by the SAG. At this stage, that strategy cannot be anything but aligned with the SRP 2015 because this should have been the cornerstone of the cluster response while preparing the response documents. The Cluster already started the discussion on the necessary adaptation of any strategy in preparation of the mid-term review of the SRP 2015. This document will certainly differ from the original 2015 Strategy as it will be a need based document instead of merely estimations.

- *What is the status of each of the core functions within your cluster? If certain core functions are not being addressed, why? What enables the cluster to fulfill certain core functions more than others; what factors enable or prohibit full functionality (e.g. human resources)? Is this different at the national or sub-national level?*

The ESNFI cluster faced on recent years a high turnover of coordinators that hampered the adequate deliver of core functions/services. The performance evaluation is ongoing and the survey summary will be the proper document to use on providing adequate responses. From the Coordinator's perspective, the support of service deliver is partially fulfilled as the regional clusters are not led by dedicated and technical able staff, being Cluster Coordination a secondary task (most of the time out of their own TORs). The other two areas that are still underserved are the monitoring and evaluating performance (issues of access and unsecure operational environment) and building the preparedness and contingency planning capacity (overlaps with task forces and lack of sufficient technical capacity in the regions). The factors that impede the cluster full functionality are the insufficient availability of dedicated Staff at the National level (no IMO & National Officer ESNFI) and the already explained non-dedicated Staff at the Regional sub-clusters.

- *What other non-core functions does the cluster perform, if any? What is the purpose, level of effort required, partner participation or benefit, etc.?*

The cluster has been providing Ad Hoc advice to task forces and ensuring that relief operations and future planning on refugees and returnee assistance are aligned with cluster standards and operational priorities, avoiding gaps and duplications. These actions are of particular benefit as avoiding returnees to become IDPs due to lack of support/adequate solutions in areas of return. The constant and chronically ill cycle of displacement has been a challenge that is being addressed altogether with development actors and core responding Agencies (i.e. informal IDPs urban settlements). In these cases, the intervention of implementing partners of leading UN Agencies that are also ESNFIs Cluster members are benefited by the use of our standards and coordination scheme.

- *What is the status of all working groups, task forces and/or sub-clusters? How often do they meet? Who attends? What is their core area of work and achievements/outputs?*

There are two active working groups: the TWG and the SAG. The TWG has been very active in the preparation of the Cluster Technical Standards and also contributed in Ad Hoc basis to provide technical advice to partners in certain proposals. It has been meeting monthly and reporting to Cluster's Monthly meetings in regular basis. The SAG is active and has been engaged in the preparation of the Cluster strategy, providing strategic advice and discussing the main operational issues. SAG is meeting in a monthly basis and also reporting to ESNFI Cluster's monthly meeting.

- *Does the current context continue to warrant sustained collective coordination action across your sector? Consider key events over the last 12-24 months requiring coordinated action, which coordination mechanisms served as the primary fora, who primarily led coordination at field level, were any gaps identified?*

It's evident that the volatile operational environment and the lack of political instability are factors that may not improve substantially in the incoming 12-24 months. The geographical unpredictability and the scale of the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict require proper coordination mechanisms that are only able to respond under the current scheme. Moreover, the donor's concerns on aid delivery efficiency and effects of potential corruption are additional factors to sustain the current coordination network.

ANDMA leadership is evident on the coordination of assessments and response to recurrent natural disasters. The active role of the PDMC on affected Provinces is a parallel mechanism altogether with IDP task forces as mentioned above. In general we noticed many overlaps instead of gaps. Besides, we have HRTs and OCTs forums. This create confusion to Cluster Partners.

- *How many operational cluster partners typically respond during emergencies (what percentage of total number of cluster partners)? Specify main/lead partners versus implementing partners. How does the cluster coordinate or*

*support them? Is this done through formal modalities (cluster meeting), or ad hoc/direct coordination during the emergency with operational partners?*

During emergencies from 12 to 15 cluster partners are able to respond but only those who are already deployed in areas where response is needed can secure immediate relief assistance. This would bring down the number to 5 or 7 cluster partners responders to each emergency. Besides the leading Agencies responding to emergencies (UNHCR for conflict displacement and IOM for natural disasters) only 20% of cluster partners have funds and means for relief operations. Other partners having operational capacity depend on scarce funding to use their implementing networks. The coordination of most of the emergencies is decentralized (regional sub clusters) and headed by the leading Agencies as primarily responders/implementers. Normally, there are formal meetings and routine reports but there are also recent records of Ad-Hoc coordination schemes after the new Government has been in charge. On this regard, we've seen a change in the Government approach requesting support directly to cluster partners and using a parallel channel with UN OCHA that, in turn, reverts to Clusters. In the field, cluster partners are directly approached by Officials from Provincial government to request support on emergency situations. The cluster is not being informed on the Government capacities and response strategies, thus unable to plan ahead to avoid assistance gaps and overlaps.

- *What types of emergency situations have occurred in the recent past where humanitarian coordination needs for your sector have arisen? At what levels? Were coordination needs met? If yes, by who? If not, why was there a gap? How can these be addressed in future?*

The common emergency situations are natural disasters (floods, landslides, avalanches) and armed conflicts (both planned military operations from the Government and spontaneous insurgency). The coordination and preparedness on natural disasters have been effective as the result of both the experience acquired by humanitarian and coordination actors and the predictability and availability of funds. On the contrary, the response to displacement due to armed conflict has been difficult to coordinate due to the overlapping with IDP task force and the access challenge posed by insecurity and the risk of cluster partners being perceived to be aligned to conflicting parties. It was evident during last clashes in Helmand province that the Government Officials are not fully aware of the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independency and impartiality. There was a lot of pressure to cluster partners to provide assistance without proper vulnerability assessments, to accept military escorts and to assist in areas determined by the Government. It was only arduous negotiation and the OCHA intervention that humanitarian actors were able to stand on its principles and also to convey the message to GIRoA that future military plans should consider the humanitarian impact and evaluate its consequences.

Regarding the coordination gaps and challenges, we noticed that Governors are frequently stepping up on the local responses and the PDMCs are a very effective tool to coordinate but in most cases the cluster priorities are modified to meet local demands. Still is not clear what the government capacities are and how main resources (like helicopters or warehouses, NFI and FI stocks) can be available/used in cases of emergencies.

In the future, it would be recommend that OCHA leads on the gathering of information of GIRoA response capacity and strategies and to provide a platform to analyze potential gaps and areas of intervention for humanitarian actors. This is substantially important as the current response plans are based solely on the HNO and the response capacity of humanitarian partners, which shouldn't be the case as we should focus to fill the gaps not being the sole responder.

- *How are localized coordination needs of your cluster being met in the field? What reports (if any) are you receiving from field partners on relevant coordination needs/gaps? How is the cluster (or another mechanism) addressing coordination needs indicated by local partners?*

In the field, the ESNFI have four active sub clusters that regularly provide a coordination platform for CPs and stakeholders. In the remaining regions, focal points are providing Ad-hoc support and also integrating the responses when task forces are activated. Although we receive monthly reports from all regions there is an evident lack of IM support and the new designed reporting formats posed new challenges for our partners. There should be necessary to give additional time to allow new standardization reporting to allow smooth IM processing.

In general, few local partners are integrated in ESNFIs coordination scheme, most of them as implementing partners of already cluster members, thus, the technical standards and operational modalities are similar. ACBAR has been the normal interlocutor with a wider range of local NGOs engaged in direct assistance and the recurrent concern has been the access to funding mechanisms (i.e. CHF) for what the cluster is facilitating the interaction and potential coaching initiatives.