International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Pictures: J Kellett

A Review of the Emergency Shelter Cluster

Koshi Floods Emergency Response

Nepal, from August 2008

Jan Kellett

Acknowledgements

The writer would like to thank all those interviewed as part of this review for their honest and openness, and their willingness to put aside their everyday and sometime urgent activities to examine what has come before.

In particular the writer would like to thank the IFRC Head of Delegation in Nepal and her team in Kathmandu for the welcome as well as the much-appreciated logistical and organisational arrangements put in place both for capital and field components of this review. Thanks also go the National Society for providing transportation and guidance during the visit to Koshi valley.

Jan Kellett, Italy 23rd March 2009
jankellett@yahoo.com

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADB: Asian Development Bank

APF: Armed Police Force

CCCM: Camp Coordination and Camp Management

CDO: Chief District Office(r)

DAO   District Administration Office

DDRC: District Disaster Response Committees

DEPROSC: Development Project Service Centre

DRR: Disaster Risk Reduction

DUDBC: Department of Urban Development and Building Control

ERC: Emergency Relief Coordinator

ESC: Emergency Shelter Cluster

GCM: General Coordination Meeting

GBV: Gender Based Violence

GoN: Government of Nepal

HC: Humanitarian Coordinator

HDI: Human Development Index

IASC: Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IDP   Internally Displaced Person

IFRC   International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

IM: Information Management

I/NGO   International / Non-Governmental Organisation

KVS: Koshi Victims Society

IOM   International Organization for Migration

KVSC   Koshi Victim's Struggle Committee

LDO: Local Development Office(r)

LWF   Lutheran World Federation

MoHA   Ministry of Home Affairs

MoLD   Ministry of Local Development

MoPPW: Ministry of Planning & Physical Planning

NFI/s   Non-Food Item(s)

NRCS   Nepal Red Cross Society

NS: National Society (of the Red Cross)

OCHA   UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR   Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

RDRC: Regional Disaster Relief Commissioner

RC/HC: Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator

SC   Save the Children

SSI: Shelter Sector Items

TOR: Terms of Reference

UNDAC   United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UN   United Nations

VDC   Village Development Committee

WASH   Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

WFP   World Food Programme

WHO   World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The core challenge to the response to Koshi, not just for IFRC (International Federation of the Red Cross) the Emergency Shelter Cluster (ESC) but for all clusters and their responsible agencies, was gauging a proper response that balanced the imperative to deploy the cluster when there is a need, with a respect for and incorporation of, in-country capacity, especially when it became clear that this would be at most a mid-level disaster. This challenge has been made more complex by a move to not just activate the cluster system in Nepal but formalise it permanently, which had implications for the response and future crisis coordination.

For IFRC what takes centre stage is less the actual activities of the ESC itself than the relationship of the Federation as convenor of the cluster both at global and in-country levels. In fact, the intricacy of this disaster which demanded an international response to levels below the deployment of a full coordination team and involved the formalisation of clusters at a country level has actually highlighted the complexity of the relationship of IFRC to the cluster system and illuminated some existing tensions as well as future challenges.

The Response

Following the breach of the Koshi embankment close to 70,000 people fled to high ground to avoid the flooding. Search and rescue managed by government was reportedly of a good order; few deaths were recorded. A joint government-UN lead coordination system was launched at field and capital levels. Throughout the response, the work of the humanitarian actors, of clusters and coordination, has been largely focused on temporary camps established in and around community buildings as well as available unaffected land. Almost all those who fled needed housing and thus emergency shelter had an important role to play.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the response and the coordination of the response have overall been good. Throughout the disaster, with perhaps a few problematic exceptions, humanitarian need has been met. There have been, however, some issues which are relevant to understanding both the development of the response for emergency shelter as well as its actual activities. This includes the weakness of government such as its over-reliance on others the government's inability to coordinate well, its lack of consultation with partners and how the politicising of aid affected its work. Secondly there were some serious disconnections within coordination through the cluster system, which included a general lack of understanding, a slow speed of response and the seeming development of parallel systems. Thirdly, it was felt by many that the work of clusters was imbalanced; some did not embrace their leadership role under the cluster system and this seriously impacted in inter-cluster work as well as lead to issues such as an absence of firewall between operations and coordination, a lack of capacity and independence, and the perception that there were different levels of expectation for different clusters.

Although the low level of prioritisation of disaster management in Nepal, as well as the question of how unmet needs in disaster might exacerbate or create conflict, are important context to the response, the key factor affecting that response was the manner in which the cluster system was activated. In response to Koshi the cluster system was not only activated but also formalised i.e., decided as a standing system with standing leadership. The evaluation has revealed some important issues with this, which include misunderstandings of what cluster leads signed up for, an absence of discussion on key issues and perhaps even incompatibilities between global clusters and standing systems, and limited government involvement in the process. In fact the manner in which the cluster system has been set up and the management of the system once created has been a key aspect of problems in the response indicated above.

<u>Activisation of the Emergency Shelter Cluster</u>

The ESC's response to Koshi was conditioned by the nature of the disaster and the manner in which the cluster system has been formalised. This relatively small disaster (in South and South-East Asian terms) has actually proved more difficult to respond to than larger ones because a full roll-out of the cluster would be seen as an exaggeration. Yet at the same time country capacity within the NRCS and the Federation's Delegation, despite some development, was deemed insufficient.

The IFRC has expressed some concern about the manner in which the formalisation of the cluster system has pressurised it into making a decision, but more important than this is how the process has highlighted existing tensions within the global cluster system and IFRC's role as convenor of Emergency Shelter,. There are some important further challenges for IFRC when it comes to considering if or how to have a permanent cluster role in both Nepal and other countries: firstly, how the ESC responds only during a 'current' disaster, secondly, the complexity of having a non-UN actor leading within a structure largely dominated by the UN and thirdly, the complexity of the role of National Societies within a permanent stand-by cluster structure.

In this case the IFRC responded to the request for formalisation by modifying the normal roll-out to include a large capacity-building component, both within the global cluster itself as well as with the National Society. This was seen as building for the future both in Nepal and globally. The team therefore included an experienced coordinator, a trainee coordinator, an Information Manager on his first mission and two national staff recruited through the National Society. Unfortunately the capacity building element was undermined by a lack of a concrete plan of action and clear objectives, a lack of continuity in early staffing of the ESC team and a somewhat difficult relationship between the ESC and the National Society. The latter is especially important for the Federation examine as the cluster system continues its development.

Other aspects of activation of the cluster including both the handover and the logistical/administration arrangements have been without major problem. The former still has issues of the lack of capacity of UN-Habitat and the latter could be improved through a more flexible arrangement for contracts/financing that puts more power in the hands of those responsible: the coordinators themselves.

<u>Activities of the Shelter Cluster</u>

In general the actual activities of the cluster coordination team have been successful and there have been few if any concerns of unmet need, no doubt partly because this was a relatively small disaster compared to others such as Cyclones Sidr and Nargis. Anecdotal evidence suggests the ESC to be one of the better clusters.

The ESC has in general worked well with others especially with implementing partners within the cluster, whom have held its work in high regard. There have been problems working with some of the other clusters but it appears this is due to a lack of uniform commitment to the cluster process rather than shelter's weakness. Of some concern is the relationship with government where the speed and depth of the ESC has left key partners behind and has challenged the delegations ongoing capacity building attempts.

The ESC has been at the forefront of some of the key advocacy challenges (and has worked closely with others, especially OCHA and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster on many of them.) There have been some notable difficulties however such as ensuring a complete respect for minimum standards by government and ensuring those displaced and staying with host families to be properly registered and supported with aid.

Summary and Recommendations

At a global level IFRC should examine in-depth how the Koshi response has challenged the role of the Federation as ESC convenor. It should prioritise the issue of formalisation of clusters and work through the current tensions and future problems, developing suitable policy both internally and within the cluster system. This should be followed by a re-evaluation of its own deployment scenarios with special emphasis on how to better build in-country capacity. It should also strengthen current Terms of References (TOR) of deployed staff and consider how to give them (and/or the delegations they work with) more decision-making freedom in administration and finances during disasters. There are specific areas such as beneficiary communications which could also be strengthened. Finally the Federation should consider how better to support UN-Habitat in its development of its handover role.

At a country level the Federation needs to carefully consider its role in the formalised cluster system, especially how that interacts with the National Society. Core to this is an insistence within the IASC that there be a proper plan for all clusters, modified and agreed TORs, and that expectations for all cluster leads are the same. Work to develop the capacity of all national actors, especially key partners the National Society and emergency's shelters focal point in government, the Department of Urban Development and Building Control (DUDBC) is essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS: GLOBAL CLUSTER

1) *Koshi Review*: Analyse in detail the challenges this disaster has highlighted within the Federation's global role as Emergency Shelter Cluster Convenor.

2) *Permanent Cluster Establishment and IFRC Deployment Policy*:

   a) *Policy*: The Federation has to develop policy about how to manage the drive to have permanent, formalised clusters in countries where it is expected to be ready to respond to disasters. This policy should include a balance of the following points:

     - When to deploy the cluster and when to relay on national capacity.
     - A deliberation on the role of the National Societies and their place in any formalised system.
     - Whether or not to (or how much to) challenge the drive to institutionalise clusters at a country level.

   b) *Relations to the Global System:* Continue to push for clarity in the area of the establishment of permanent clusters (of whatever kind) and how they relate to the global humanitarian cluster system.

   c) *Out of Disaster*: Work with OCHA HRSU and other clusters to examine what the formalisation of clusters means out of disasters. This needs understanding down to field level.

   d) *National Societies:* Examine carefully the role of Federation National Societies within formalised permanent cluster systems and establish appropriate guidelines

3) *Deployment Scenarios and Flexibility*:

   a) *Performance*: Regardless of the work of other clusters the ESC must continue working to very standards.

b) *Flexibility*: Continue a flexible approach to deployments which take into account all needs, including in-country capacity, capacity-building requirements, cluster development etc.

c) *Model Scenarios:* Consider building models of deployment for different scenarios, especially where capacity building/training is a core element. Redesign terms of reference for staff and missions appropriately. Modify ongoing training programmes where appropriate.

d) *Conflict Analysis in Deployments*: When considering deployment, include a detailed analysis of how a lack or particular scale of response may contribute to existing conflict or create conflict between authorities and communities or between communities themselves.

4) *RC/HC Protocols*: Work with OCHA at a global level to examine accountabilities to RC/HC in cluster responses, to ensure that all clusters are treated the same in the field, their work examined at the same levels and each held accountable to the same standards.

5) *Cluster and Emergency Shelter Training in Key Countries*: Go through key disaster-prone countries and train IFRC and National Societies (NS) on general cluster roles and responsibilities, as well as detail on the work of the ESC.

6) *Capacity Building:*

a) *Balance Between Deployment Needs:* Carefully review missions and what is to be done. If capacity building is a priority, either of IFRC, NS or government, then give it the space to do so. Work with ESC coordinators and Heads of Delegations to ensure enough time and effort is set aside to do this work. If necessary slow down implementation of cluster activities.

b) *Develop a detailed capacity-building component* for ESC roll-out:

- Indicate what is expected of staff and what the goals are, as well as, not forgetting, the necessary resources needed to do the work and reach those goals.
- Make this component of the ESC flexible enough to be adapted to different contexts.
- Add it to future training sessions.
- Seek out additional expert training staff where needed.

7) *Strengthen Roles and Responsibilities:*

a) *Terms of Reference Strength and Clarity*: Ensure all internal partners are completely aware of the roles and responsibilities of the ESC and how they interplay with the IFRC and the National Societies.

b) *Delegations and Humanitarian Reform*: All Head of Delegations (HoD) should be aware of their responsibility for carrying out IFRC obligations to humanitarian reform, and all should be trained, not just in Emergency Shelter but in all aspects of the reform process. Following on from this, if the Head of Delegation is supposedly responsible for this, then it should be written into their TOR.

c) *Regional Role*: Develop a better understanding of what regional offices of the Federation have in decision-making processes *regarding deployments of ESC teams*, and consider how they can support the work of teams when posted.

8) *Staffing/Logistics/Administration*:

a) *Continuity*: Staff continuity is essential – sacrifice in other areas to establish continued staffing.

b) *Administrative Structures*: Consider constructing a more solid administrative structure to support ESC units, especially for less experienced coordinators.

c) *Contracts*: Ensure contracts are issued before staff members are deployed.

d) *Authority*: Streamline administration issues in both human resources and financing. Consider providing additional authority to senior coordinators of ESC or Heads of Delegation.

e) *Handover*: Internal handovers to be thorough regardless of circumstances. Formalise handover procedures through the provision of guidelines.

9) *Handover to Recovery*:

a) *Flexibility*: Maintain a flexible approach, especially on timing, with no artificial cut-offs of support.

b) Consider a more robust support for UN-Habitat funding, given how the lack of a strong handover has an impact on IFRC reputation, but balance this with a demand for follow-through on commitments

10) *NFI/SSI Standardisation*:

a) Work to streamline NFI and SSI packages (including their quality) with cluster partners on a global level.

b) Consider formalising the NFI part of shelter emergency given its recognised work on this. Work with OCHA and cluster leads at global level and seek additional donor funding if appropriate.

11) *Information Campaign*: Develop a comprehensive dedicated public information campaign as part of global deployments, aimed not only at partners but also at beneficiaries. Examine the work of the *Listening Project* (amongst other things) and prepare easily-adaptable tools for coordination teams in advance of their deployment.

RECOMMENDATIONS: IFRC NEPAL

1) *Lessons Learnt*: There is a strong need to look at the work of the cluster from an internal perspective, examining questions such as the relationships between the ESC and NRCS and looking at lessons for a permanent role in a formalised cluster. It may be useful to open this out to a few key partners.

2) *General Capacity Building*: Continue and deepen work with government and NRCS to build internal capacity at all levels and within all programming.

3) *National Society: W*ork on developing appropriate decision-making systems in country to cover should individual staff not be in place.

4) *Government Capacity Building*:

a) *Cluster Knowledge:* Deepen work with DUDBC on their knowledge of the ESC and cluster system, especially at local levels.

b) *Institutional Knowledge*: Work with them on response models that isolate and highlight their weak capacity to respond from central to local levels. This will highlight issues to meet in the interim and could allow DUDBC advocate for more resources to meet its responsibilities.

c) *Technical Capacity*: Improve the work on technical standards within Contingency Planning that puts government at the fore.

5) *Conflict Prediction*: OHCHR is developing scenarios for early warning for violence including scenarios such as Koshi. IFRC should tap into this for help in understanding at what levels shelter can be managed internally and where external support is best sought.

6) *Permanent Cluster Issues*:

   a) *Formalised Clusters*: Work with OCHA and through the IASC to understand what formalised clusters actually mean for humanitarian response and the impact on Federation work and mandate in Nepal. Of particular note is how to develop the work of the National Society within the cluster, what level of coordination, balance between coordination and implementation etc.

   b) *Cluster Planning*: Work with the IASC, OCHA and the RC/HC to develop full and complete plans for cluster formalisation that are adopted by all cluster leads, and from that make plans that details a schedule of activities, targets, staffing and other costs etc.

   c) *Cluster Balance*: Advocate locally to ensure that all responses to disasters are of the same excellent level by all clusters. Work together with OCHA to ensure that the IASC (and the RC/HC) hold everyone to account by the same level.

   d) *Cluster Training*: IFRC to support OCHA in a more thorough dispersal of info on clusters, both pre-disaster in appropriately targeted districts, but certainly in disasters themselves. This should be linked to government leadership within the system.

   e) *Meetings*: Work with OCHA and others within the IASC to streamline and rationalise disaster response meetings within the cluster system. Urge for regular meetings of cluster leads both within and out of disaster

   f) *Alignment*: Work with OCHA, the IASC and government to better align clusters with ministries.

7) *General Coordination Development:*

   a) *Leadership*: Advocate with the RC/HC and OCHA that appropriate levels of leadership be maintained at both central and local levels during all phases of the disaster.

   b) *Transition/Early Recovery*: Advocate for complete and detailed transitions from humanitarian to recovery programming and coordination.

   c) *Civil Society*: Advocate for stronger recognition and consideration of Nepali civil society humanitarian aid during disaster response.

8) *Disaster Management Streamlining*: Work with all actors to create a more streamlined disaster management response in lieu of the new DM act and strategy coming into force.

9) *UNHCR*: Seek the assistance of the RC/HC in ensuring that UNHCR are part of the shelter discussions and ongoing developments in Nepal.

10) *Residual Humanitarian Need:* Continue to work with UN-Habitat on any residual humanitarian issues and provide appropriate support where possible.

11) *Standards*: Address standardisation of NFI and SSI packages through both the IASC and continued contingency planning processes.

INTRODUCTION:

Aim of this review

The aim of this review is to examine the deployment of the Emergency Shelter Cluster (ESC) to the Koshi Valley, Nepal, in 2008 by the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC). The report's primary focus is to identify lessons and provide recommendations on future shelter coordination by the Federation as well as assist the office in Nepal navigate its way through future shelter-coordination developments. Whilst including and reflecting the opinions of key stakeholders in the sector the report is not a general evaluation of the cluster response following the disaster but given how important the context is for the deployment and activities of the report does touch on key issues of the overall response.

The review draws on desk research, interviews and written communication with informants, and included a reasonably lengthy mission to both Kathmandu and the Koshi Valley itself.

Methodology

The following was the basic methodology of the review of Emergency Shelter in response to Koshi valleys:

1) Desk review of all available materials.
2) Interviews with key stakeholders
3) A ten-day field mission to Nepal with two days at the scene of the disaster itself.
4) The writer also attended a General Coordination Meeting (GCM) in Sunsari during the visit to the disaster site.

Desk Reviews:

The review of available documentation included correspondence regarding all aspects of the Emergency Shelter activisation and eventual handover, all the relevant situation reports compiled by OCHA, as well as relevant documentation, inter-alia:

- Terms of Reference of the Nepal Emergency Shelter Cluster (ESC) mission as well as those of all mission members: IFRC
- Contingency Planning for ESC Nepal: IFRC and partners.
- IASC Multi-Agency Assessment of Koshi, August 2008: WFP and Partners.
- Nepal Flood Appeal Sept 2008: OCHA
- Koshi Lessons Learnt Workshop: OCHA
- Jan 2009 Inter-Agency Shelter Monitoring: UN-Habitat
- Previous ESC Reviews of Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Philippines, Pakistan
- Current Humanitarian Reform Documents

Interviews:

The total number of those interviewed for the review was fifty-one people, drawn from within the IFRC, the Nepalese National Society, United Nations, Civil Society, Government, beneficiaries and donors. Of these representatives, six were also cluster leads. The breakdown was as follows:

IFRC HQ and Regional	ESC Staff (deployed & recruited)	IFRC and NRCS Nepal	Government	UN & Cluster	Implementing Organisations
5	5	7	8	19	7

<u>Mission to Nepal:</u>

The field mission to Nepal was in mid-March 2009 and lasted eleven days in total. Meetings arrangements were ably made by the administrator of IFRC. Traffic remains an issue in Kathmandu and much time was lost in travelling, unfortunate but difficult to combat given how many meetings had to be accommodated at various points and naturally the working within the schedules of already busy stakeholders.

The mission to Koshi was successful but cut short due to severe delays in leaving Kathmandu due to bad weather. Despite their being no bandhs[1] on the day itself, the late arrival prevented a visit to Saptari. However a visit was paid to camps both on the east and west side of the now-diverted Koshi flood, including to those alongside the river embankment.

Humanitarian Reform and the Cluster Approach

The cluster approach is part of a global programme of humanitarian reform which began in 2005. The programme followed the Humanitarian Response Review, commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Response Coordinator (ERC) in 2005.1 Humanitarian reform is led by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in which UN agencies are principals and NGO networks and the Federation invitees.

A response to systemic weakness in response, the humanitarian reform programme is based on three 'pillars':

- § The *cluster approach*: addressing the need for 'adequate capacity and predictable leadership in all sectors' of humanitarian response.
- § *Humanitarian financing*: addressing the need for 'adequate, timely and flexible financing' of humanitarian response, notably through the CERF.
- § *Humanitarian Coordinator strengthening*: addressing the need for 'effective leadership and coordination in emergencies' by the senior UN figure in country 2

Humanitarian reform acknowledges that effective response depends on the quality of *partnership* between the UN agencies, NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent agencies that respond globally to emergencies. Commitment to partnership between these constituencies was endorsed through a set of principles developed in 2007.

Of particular relevance to the present report is the cluster approach. However, the other 'pillars' - *Humanitarian Coordinator strengthening*, *humanitarian finance* and *partnership* - are, together with human resources, interlinked drivers of effectiveness and quality.

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[1] From the Hindi word for 'closed', a bandh is a form of protest used by political activists in Nepal and elsewhere. During a Bandh, a political party or community declares a general strike and block access to certain areas; these can last from a day to several weeks and more.

The IASC principals endorsed the cluster approach in December 2005. The eleven global clusters are seen as a mechanism that can strengthen response by ensuring predictability, accountability and partnership among agencies in different sectors. These include health, emergency shelter and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene).

At global level, a cluster is effectively a standing committee but its lead agency acts as a response unit. Cluster lead agencies are responsible for technical support, long term planning and enhancing partnership. They set standards and policy, build surge capacity, provide operational support and channel funds to country level clusters. At country level, the cluster approach is expected to ensure coherent and effective sectoral response.

Given the short history of humanitarian reform, it is not surprising that cluster operation, particularly at country level, is open to interpretation and disagreement; for example an evaluation of the cluster approach in 2007 notes that "questions and disagreements about activation in emergencies" persisted after a Standard Operating Procedure was issued in May 2007. A number of documents provide guidance on cluster working. They reflect important debate in the face of growing experience and evolving practice but do not always provide unambiguous direction or consistent terminology.

The Global Emergency Shelter Cluster

The Emergency Shelter Cluster is co-led by IFRC for natural disasters and UNHCR for conflict situations.

Partners in the global cluster are Care International, CHF International, Norwegian Refugee Council, OCHA, OXFAM, Shelter Centre and UN-HABITAT (the latter being also the focal point for early recovery within the cluster.) At country level, a global member, local and national government and any NGO involved in emergency shelter may be a cluster partner.

Emergency Shelter is one of only two clusters co-chaired by agencies other than UN or IOM. An IFRC-OCHA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) states that within an 'agreed coordination system' the Federation expects to lead or convene the Emergency.

The IFRC-OCHA MoU defines a disaster as:

> *A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.*

It defines emergency shelter as:

> *The provision of basic and immediate shelter needs necessary to ensure the survival of disaster affected persons, including "rapid response" solutions such as tents, insulation materials, other temporary emergency shelter solutions, and shelter related non-food items. This definition explicitly excludes transitional and permanent housing.*

The MoU emphasises that the Federation's commitment at country level is not open-ended and that it is not 'Provider of Last Resort' if a gap in the provision of shelter goods and services remains unfilled.

THE CONTEXT

The Disaster and the Response

Koshi Valley 18th August 2008

On the 18th of August 2008 the River Koshi in Eastern Nepal broke through an eastern retaining wall ten kilometres north of the East-West highway and effectively changed its course, now flowing through the broken barrier and cutting through five Village Development Committee (VDC) in the Sunsari district. The main East-West Highway was made impassable due to flood waters at the entrance of Koshi Tapu Wildlife Preserve –cut in five different places by the flood waters - and phone networks were down.

Immediately those affected fled to higher ground wherever that was, including areas of the highway above water and the remaining part of the embankment that was not breached, taking only limited belongings and supplies with them. Security forces were also involved in assisting early movements. Other families fled out of Sunsari across the river valley to Saptari. Some were hosted by families in the area that had been unaffected themselves.

From the beginning gauging of the scale of the damage and destruction of the flooding and thus understanding how much humanitarian aid would be needed, was a challenge. There was substantial and perhaps not unpredictable chaos at a local level in the first three to four days. Initial needs were difficult to establish due to the paucity of information. Relief efforts were also hindered by the effective severing of Eastern Nepal by the flood waters, making the Sunsari side only accessible by air and making Sunsari-Saptari travel (usually only five minutes across the river) a flight and several hours drive.

However within days more than twenty collective centres and camps had been established in schools, other community buildings, and those areas of high ground, especially along the embankment. Exact figures of those displaced remained a challenge throughout the post-disaster period, made particularly problematic by the mobile nature of the population (both within the area and across the border in India) with estimates of between 54,000 and 72,000 used. (Between 3,000 and 10,000 Indians[2] were also thought to have fled to Nepal from flood-damaged Bihar province.)

Locations of those displaced slowly coalesced into four distinct categories over the first month: those living with host families, camps established in higher areas east of the new Koshi flow, camps established in Saptari district and finally camps extending south of the embankment breach along a narrow strip of land between the embankment and the usual flow of the Koshi. Camps were often located in and around community buildings such as schools.

Most of the houses of the displaced were mud huts with bamboo frames and grass walls, or made of non-permanent materials, and were either completely destroyed or seriously damaged during the flooding itself. In the main community shelters around 50-60 people were living in one room. People were also sleeping on benches and the open floor. There was early pressure from schools, mainly private ones, for the displaced to vacate the premises so classes could resume. Emergency shelter was therefore quickly identified as one of the key issues, and seen to be needed for 3 to 4 months.

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[2] It should be noted these figures are those used by various official sources. Others have suggested it could have been many more than the 10,000 but it was almost impossible to be sure given the lack of registration, the population's continual movements etc.

The Response: Government, Clusters And Coordination During Koshi[3]

The humanitarian response to Koshi flooding was dominated at first by actors already present on the ground, of which the largest was the NRCS, but also Oxfam was already present, especially in Saptari, as well as DEPROSC and other national actors. Donations of money and goods outside of the traditional humanitarian sector (from civil society, companies and communities) were apparently considerable in the first weeks but have not been well recorded.

Oxfam had a humanitarian assessment team at the site of the embankment breach after one day, then another after 2/3 days. OCHA did its own preliminary assessment at about the same time, followed by an aerial tour. An UNDAC team arrived after two weeks[4] and on arrival they helped coordinate a more detailed multi-agency IRA (Initial Rapid Assessment) supported by WFP, that looked beyond the disaster up to six months in advance.

The government's response was initially good and its approach a serious one. A district early-warning system was apparently activated immediately and Army and armed police forces (APF) were soon involved in search and rescue - there was little loss of life. There was a first meeting of the Regional Disaster Response Committee (RDRC) on the same evening as the embankment breach (at which OCHA and the NRCS were also present) and the first meeting at district level occurred in Sunsari the next day.

On 9th of September the Humanitarian Coordinator requested the formalisation of the cluster approach, and OCHA facilitated this, both at capital and local levels, with IASC meetings at Kathmandu levels (now convened on a much more regular basis and focusing on Koshi response) and General Coordination Meetings at district levels to manage local coordination.[5]

The coordination structure evolved based on the need. At its heart was the District Disaster Response Committee (DDRC) a local government disaster management mechanism which was at Sunsari later merged with the General Coordination Meeting part-lead by OCHA. At Koshi level meetings were everyday in the morning and it was often decided in those meetings whether any specific clusters would need to meet in the afternoon. In general there were good relations between international actors and local key officials.

Political and security challenges were prominent throughout the relief phase, especially in Saptari.

Several funding appeals were coordinated by OCHA, an initial $10 million request to in-country donors for immediate relief efforts after two weeks, which was then rolled into a second and more comprehensive supplementary Floods Response Plan a month later for an additional $15 million. The Floods appeal was funded to $10 million. The IFRC made an appeal for (and received) $2.2 million dollars which was for emergency shelter and NFIs for NRCS. The government also prepared a nine-month plan in early September with a budget of $6 million.

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[3] Other assessments were done by ADB on economic affects (for both Koshi and Western floods) and UNDP BCPR for early recovery. UNDP also funded UNESCO to undertake a Hazard Risk Assessment of the affected area.

[4] This delay was partly because the Government of Nepal did not immediately ask for international assistance and the scale of the emergency was not immediately apparent.

[5] See page 19 for more details of the manner of the cluster formalisation.

Problems for the Response

During the life of the relief operations amidst which the Emergency Shelter Cluster was a player, a series of key issues have been identified as problematic:

Government Weakness

The government appears to have taken the flooding very seriously, even though it never made a formal request for external assistance. This is in part a question of politics since the disaster happened on only the second day after the new government's inauguration and was its first unexpected challenge; self-sufficient strong leadership was the preferred image. However, it was felt by many actors that regardless of the political dimension - that this was a new authority wanting to exert control and show leadership - the government in general had good intentions.

> **Government of Nepal Priorities**
>
> According to the office of the Prime-Minister the three key priorities of the government are:
>
> 1) Peace-Building.
> 2) The Constitution
> 3) Good Governance.
>
> But humanitarian action "assumes utmost priority when needed."

Some observations of its involvement in the relief operation include:

1) *Reliance on Others*: Whilst reportedly certain line agencies were active and showed commendable leadership at a local level overall the government's relief efforts were overly dependent on other actors, especially in distribution and coordination. For the former NRCS was asked to undertake the bulk of distributions[6] whilst OCHA undertook the bulk of coordination and information management.
2) . The authorities did not in general engage well with all humanitarian actors. Due to the poor capacity of staff and offices, and a lack of basic equipment, the local government was, in one person's words "totally dependent on other organisations to do the actual work."
3) *Coordination*: This reliance on others led to core problems for the relief efforts where government leadership was necessary. Lack of coordination in camps lead to under-counting of aid needed – registration and verification was poor. Agencies stepped in to coordinate camps when government action was not present.
4) *Lack of Consultation:* There was in general poor communication with other actors; the government was sometimes guilty of moving ahead without discussion, such as when during the registration period it suddenly changed its mind and, without consultation, demanded organisations involved change from a light to detailed assessment *of victims.*
5) *Decision-Making and Disconnection from Central Authorities*: Local authorities were always challenged by their inability to take decisions, compounded by poor information flow from national to local levels. Local authorities had to refer to the capital on almost all decisions; as one organisation put it, "they always required the green light" even with quite simple matters. Key decisions such as the confirmation of new camp locations were thus delayed by days, even weeks. Non-government actors often knew more of current national policy on Koshi than local authorities themselves.

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[6] See section on NRCS, Page 37 for more details

6) *Communications to Victims*: Information to beneficiaries was very poor. Miss-information was not unusual, such as if a family did not have a shelter at a camp they would not receive assistance, which was not true and lead to empty tents erected just for the sake of aid receipts. Rumour was also commonplace and went largely unchallenged, for example when local politicians were accused of twisting government aid of 50,000 rupees for return, saying it was actually being a dowry fund for families.

7) Politicisation: Local authorities were in the middle and often the focus for political protests. This affected their work, especially in Saptari.

> ### Local Government Capacity
>
> The challenges for local government locally should not be under-estimated. Sunsari district for example, has one vehicle which is almost always broken and for which there are no funds to repair. They have no trained manpower for disasters and often not even electricity supply.
>
> As part of its Koshi response IOM gave them two computers and a printer and a generator but they reported there was no money for fuel for the generator.

An overview of the government role in addressing Koshi needs would be that it tried its best with minimal resources and capacity but in general its ability to meet the need was weak, there was at times chaos, rapid changes in decisions or too-slow decision-making and a lack of leadership when it mattered. Rapid changes in key staff did not help. On the other hand the government was appreciated for embracing its role in the cluster system and showing good will to humanitarian actors; according to some organisations the government improved its quality of work compared to previous years. At a local level the government has received praise for managing a very large disaster compared to its capacity. DDRCs were quickly brought together by CDOs and when they became heavily politicised in Sunsari authorities made a good decision to move in shifting the bulk of decision-making to the GCM (where political actors where not present) where together with OCHA humanitarian actors could manage the relief process.

Another encouraging sign was that the government at all levels recognises its incapacity to manage key aspects of disaster management.

Coordination and Cluster Disconnections

OCHA had previously worked with local government on disaster response and preparedness that also identified sector leads roughly along the lines of the cluster model, and once the Koshi breached the embankment line ministries at district level were asked to join relevant clusters.

Several issues between how cluster coordination was intended to work and the reality of Koshi implementation have appeared during the course of the evaluation:

- *Lack of Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities*: There was a general lack of understanding of the cluster system across not only government structures but humanitarian actors including some UN agencies. It was not clear to all exactly what clusters were and what cluster leads would do. For example some believed that cluster leads would do all the work themselves. Issues such as 'the last resort' in aid were hardly known at all. The basic Terms of Reference (TOT) of both the cluster system generally and individual clusters was reportedly not well circulated.

- *Imposition of Clusters*: Some felt clusters were imposed on the situation rather than adding value. It was suggested that the UN should have "supported the government more directly instead of imposing clusters", and that UNDAC "arrived with only the cluster approach in mind"
- *Slow Speed of the Response*: Several of those interviewed felt that OCHA was late to take the lead in coordination, in indicating to the humanitarian community the severity of the damage, to start the cluster approach (the latter Saptari specific), and also in putting together funding appeals[7].
- *Lack of Government Leadership at Local Levels*: When cluster meetings occurred locally government involvement was weak, officials' attendance poor and those that did attend in general not ready to make decisions. Cluster meetings at Kathmandu level were almost never jointly convened; although regular IASC operational meetings were held mostly lead by OCHA (and which acted more or less like cluster-lead meetings) there was rarely a government officer present unless the RC/HC was chairing the meeting. This meant that senior most humanitarian forum for Koshi in the country was without a counterpart.
- *Parallel Systems Developed*: This in part led to the perception that there were parallel systems in aid coordination. It was not clear to many what the connection was between the government's Central National Disaster Relief Committee (CNDRC) and the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC) meetings[8]; there was no clear information flow between these two structures.
- *National & Local Gaps*: It was felt by some that just as government connections between local and central authorities was poor, so the same could be said of cluster-coordination structures. Several respondents said that at the GCM there was not enough information on policy decisions centrally. Others claimed that agencies involved in cluster leadership did not always have a good field presence, and despite their cluster responsibilities, they did not improve this presence during the lifetime of the response.
- *Meetings Management*: As often occurs in crisis situations when the cluster system is activated there can soon be too many meetings for actors to manage, especially for smaller organisations who implement in two, three or even four different cluster areas. At a local level this appears to have been reasonably managed by having key issues around CCM and shelter run through the GCM co-chaired by OCHA and local authorities. Poor attendance appeared to be more a problem of cluster meetings in the capital. The absence of recovery within IASC operational meetings was seen a flaw as it slowed support for transition.

Imbalanced Cluster Activities[9]

If there was a particular issue that greatly affected the international response to Koshi it was the imbalance in activities undertaken by cluster leads, both the quality and quantity of their own work and the work they undertook in their role as cluster managers.

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[7] As mentioned earlier this was due in part because of the slow realisation of the extent of the disaster and the difficulty accessing the area cut off by the breach. In lieu of OCHA coordination in the first weeks Oxfam was the prime focal point for Saptari activities..

[8] This was probably exacerbated by the lack of OCHA presence at the CNDRC; post-Koshi OCHA was granted observer status and thus has direct access to government decision-making.

[9] Although this report does not investigate the operation of all the clusters it is clear from interviews with stakeholders within the humanitarian response that the Emergency Shelter Cluster was seen as one of the strongest of the clusters in both activities and advocacy. A more full examination of other clusters work would be needed before making judgements on the overall quality of their work.

Several of those interviewed talked of a lack of commitment from all clusters, which affected both coordination and implementation in the disaster-affected area. Some felt that not everyone actually followed the cluster system, and cite examples of a lack of communication between cluster leads, such as when WASH placed toilets in a area designed for a camp without actually informing CCM. It was felt that several agencies responsible for cluster coordination just carried on 'business as usual' – they did not convene meetings and they did not work across clusters.

Examples of imbalances in clusters included:

- *Core Cluster Responsibilities*: Several clusters were said to have avoided having proper monitoring of government stated figures, whilst in the issue of standards clusters made decisions to support government actions that broke guidelines that cluster leaders are supposed to follow, such as *Sphere*.
- *Double-Hat*: A basic lack of understanding of core cluster duties, and perhaps an inability to see the complexity of being both an agency representative as well as independent cluster lead.
- *Not enough capacity*: Of all the clusters activated only two had external surge capacity activated (ESC and CCM) whilst others either utilised some spare capacity in-country and a few appeared to continue almost business as usual despite the disaster[10].
- *Levels of Cluster Knowledge*: The knock-on effect of this was that externally deployed staff were much more aware of the cluster approach, their role and responsibilities both internally and to the system as a whole. This further fuelled an actual or perceived imbalance in cluster work.
- *Divide between External Actors and Internal Actors*: Clusters without external surge staff felt that these arrivals knew little of the Nepal situation, as one cluster lead said, for example, "people don't know latrines, they don't use them. They [external cluster leads] had expectations which were not Nepali-realistic".
- *Expectations Different*: Several clusters (including the ESC) felt they were being asked to more than others by the RC/HC. There was the feeling that expectation levels were not the same for all clusters. It was suggested by several members of the ESC that they were being asked more because the other cluster leads were much closer to the RC/HC, this closer relationship making it more difficult for the RC/HC to both gauge their work and hold the UN agencies responsible to account.

It should be noted that one of the complications of analysing the cluster response to Koshi is because of the imbalance in work through the clusters (both in terms of quantity of work and work done in the 'spirit' of clusters) it is a challenge to separate out cluster-work from what the agencies might ordinarily do anyway.

International Implementing Agencies Relatively Not Active

From the start of Koshi implementing agencies were mixed in their response. There was not even a single arrival of a new international humanitarian agency to Nepal following Koshi and neither were any new international staff posted. Furthermore it was felt that even some of those that are present did not always

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[10] For example CCM had one external staff member arriving for 2 weeks, followed by others that arrived for several months, the last international leaving during the writer's mission in mid to late March. WFP reported that they were able to shift around internally to free up a person to do the bulk of the coordination work for Food Security. Wash had extra capacity from only November only.

respond with strength, partly of course because they felt there was not that much need. Those that did work in Koshi were often ones that already had a strong presence there.

One effect of this relative lack of activity that was mentioned by several respondents was the lack of international or senior national presence in the field, senior enough to challenge the government in its decision-making.

<u>Lack of a Transition Plan</u>

Transition was difficult for Koshi firstly because of the time it took to repair the embankment itself: there was no return for thousands of families because their land was still under water, "how could you do transition when a large part of your target population's land is under water" one person asked. (There was also some concern that other parts of the embankment might breach given that the first occurred with the river at about only quarter of possible capacity.) Only in January when the embankment was fixed and water drained away from farmland could assessments be made of the extent of damage, sand-build-up etc.

This delay of transition planning was exacerbated by a lack of a UN Development Programme (UNDP) early recovery presence until late October with actual deployment of staff only by late November. However, the presence of early recovery cluster presence was not requested until late in the response which may betray a misunderstanding of its role, given that it should be on the ground as soon as all the other clusters. Similarly there does appear to be a misconception or miscommunication on the issue of transition generally, where UNDP and early recovery where seen as responsible for transition (and coordination) within the cluster approach once humanitarian interventions have large finished rather than being a collective issue in a move towards full government leadership. (A detailed analysis of this issue is beyond the remit of this report.)

Root Causes Behind Response Problems

The Challenge of Gauging the Response

The Koshi flood was, according to one person interviewed, "a serious wake-up call for government and the humanitarian community"; it was also a "huge disaster for local people and local authorities." Yet despite these thoughts from the first moment of the disaster and for several weeks after, gauging both the scale of the Koshi flooding damage as well as the application of appropriate levels of aid was a great challenge.

Nepal suffers from regular, annual inundations across the country and these often cause localised and temporary displacement of populations that need short-term assistance to tide them over under they can return to their land. Several people mentioned how in September 2008, just a month after Koshi, close to 250,000 people were temporarily displaced in the West of the country. Secondly seventy thousand people affected is probably a mid-level disaster by South and South-East Asian Standards. Nepal's government meanwhile is not particularly less able to respond to disasters than other countries of similar scale that have suffered a disaster of this size. The people affected, though mostly landless who work land granted to them by landlords in return for a share of any crop, are not particularly worse off than other communities in Nepal.

Koshi was clearly part of that regular inundation but three aspects pushed response needed beyond this usual flood-displacement-return scenario in Nepal:

1) The suddenness and intensity of the disaster itself with the displacement of populations across a five Village Development Committee (VDC) area – many people were seriously affected in a very short amount of time and the <u>bulk of most people's assets were lost.</u>

2) It was clear very soon that the embankment was so damaged that only major repairs could fix and thus <u>people could not return to their land for some time</u> – this necessitated a relief operation that was beyond the short-term help usually required.

3) Another unusual feature of the Koshi flood that became readily apparent after the embankment was fixed and water diverted into its usual course, was that there was <u>much damage that could never be restored</u> (with more than two metres of sand on previously fertile agricultural land in some places) preventing return for up to 20,000 people; thus a continuation of some level of aid would be needed until a durable solution could be found[11].

4) The impact of the large number of Indian nationals displaced into Nepal by the flooding is very difficult to gauge but given that some estimates put the figure up to and beyond 10,000 people, and that government authorities were at best very reluctant to provide support, this has further pushed the disaster beyond the norm for Nepal.

During the whole process the relatively small amount of people affected by Koshi was balanced against these three aspects and the variable conclusions reached by organisations has clearly modified individual commitments to the relief process, seen in both the cluster coordination in general as well as in the work of individual clusters. As one person stated, "Koshi was strange; it was not expected to be a cluster situation." The ESC was no exception.

Disaster Management in Nepal

Though natural disasters occur with some frequency in Nepal, especially flooding and landslides, continuing to exacerbate existing community tensions and wiping out development gains, Disaster Management (DM) is still not a top institutional priority in comparison to ones of peace, security, reconciliation and the development of a new constitution. This clearly needs addressing and it is admitted as much by government. Senior officials believe that response, recovery and rehabilitation, as well as preparedness are all at best poor.

DM is governed by the Natural Calamities act of 1982, which stipulates the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) as lead agency in disaster response. Coordinating structures governed by this act include:

- Central National Disaster Response Committee[12] with key line ministries. (chaired by the Deputy Prime-Minister, who is also Minister of Home Affairs.)
- Regional Disaster Response Committee. (RDRC)
- District Disaster Response Committee: This is lead by the Chief District Officer (senior govt official at local level) and is responsible for managing disasters at a local level.

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[11] Displaced families were identified as coming from three areas– designated red, yellow and green. The green families can return will little more difficulty than normal. Yellow families need help to remove up to 50cm of sand on their land that government believe is possible. Red families come from land with land made completely unusable by sand build-up; they cannot return but must be relocated.

[12] The NRCS is an ex-officio member on each of the national disaster response levels.

However some issues are clearly problematic for government response in general, some of which have direct implications for the work of IFRC including:

1) The government is still on a response and relief mode. The existing legislation does legislate for neither risk reduction nor recovery. Responsibility for recovery and reconstruction is beneath the Ministry of Physical Planning but is founded on weak general legislation and has few links to MoHA activities.
2) The disaster management unit within the Ministry of Home Affairs is a marginal part of one division that deals with both planning and narcotics control. It is also greatly understaffed.
3) Due to government changes in August 2008 crisis management staff at all levels have changed, both nationally and right down to district levels. According to OCHA the Joint secretary of Disaster Management has changed three times since the Koshi disaster whilst at district level Saptari has had four changes of Chief Development Officer.
4) Due to the general weakness of Disaster Management in government the NRCS is almost always called upon to do the actual humanitarian work of relief, which further diminishes government responsibility and experience.

> "Koshi is a particular tragedy as it could have been prevented, with appropriate early warning mechanisms. The disaster was an institutional disaster, rather than a natural disaster "
> *Humanitarian Coordinator*

In 2007 the UNDP and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) helped authorities develop a replacement act, one that focused on Disaster Management, accompanied by a new strategy including institutional and policy reform. The new strategy considers the whole cycle of a disaster, places disaster management directly within the office of the Prime-Minister and makes mainstreaming of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) a priority across ministries.

However the act remains in draft only and is unlikely to go through parliament for some time, although importantly MoHA suggests that government is changing from being relief-centric because "it has to" regardless to the passing of the law itself.

UNDP is working to identify focal points with nine ministries and the PM's office, asking them to work through DRR in lieu of the act and strategy being formalised. However this process appears unconnected with the process of having permanent clusters aligned to ministries,[13] even though the cluster structure itself is discussed within the strategy.

The Conflict Context

One aspect of the decision-making process (though not openly debated between IASC partners) was how the disaster could impact on peace, security and reconciliation in Nepal. Natural disasters frequently exacerbate existing conflict on the ground and there is reason to believe that a poorly managed relief operation could well have impacted on general security. Disasters could create more conflict if not handled well.

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[13] There is combined international commitment to Disaster Management in Nepal. The country has been chosen by key actors (World Bank, IFRC, UNDP, OCHA, ISDR) to work on Disaster Risk Reduction in a joint fashion; the RC/HC also sees it as a priority for the international community.

"[in Nepal] the peace process is fragile and there is a lot of manoeuvring for political position… with a disaster thrown into the mix there is a chance for political parties to politicise the situation and any aid given. They may create new groups of victims with new sets of grievances and could exacerbate conflict or hurt peace-processes, especially when linked to resettlement and land issues." Donor Representative

As one person commented "you can feel the tensions on the ground in many places", there is conflict and post-conflict wrapped up in issues of the new government, federalism and the new constitution. There are already concerns that Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the West of the country have encroached on forest land used by native populations. There are real concerns of flaring localised violence, between APF and armed groups or particularly between communities.

Of course there are not only negative aspects to the sudden arrival of new families in other communities. There is an opportunity to break down barriers. The HC remarked how, "we saw in Koshi that many families opened their homes to the displaced, and the local communities provided food, shelter (through schools), and clothing." At the same time there has to be caution when considering the impact of new people on scare resources or when those affected receive relief nearby unaffected but poor communities.

With the Koshi flooding there are clearly particular security/conflict reasons for being concerned about the level and quality of aid, and additional context for decisions when or if to deploy external cluster teams.

- *A New Peace*: After a war of ten years Nepal has only recently reached a sustained peaceful phase with the inauguration of the new government in August 2008.

> "Political parties in the opposition fomented opposition and confusion about government policies (relating to the Koshi disaster)in order to embarrass and frustrate the current government"
> *UN Staff Member*

- *The political transition:*, which includes the drafting of a new inclusive constitution – has people expecting much from the Maoist authorities, which include big programmes promised both before and after the war's end that have not yet been fulfilled. There are other tensions already existing in public services, especially power and water supply, for which the new government is mostly held responsible.
- *Conflict History*: This region affected is already an area of conflict, including the civil war which was particularly evident in its latter years; for example in November 2001 over 100 people were killed in clashes. There also remains (in simplistic terms) substantial grievances between Koshi Madheshis ("people of the plains") and Pahadis ("people of the hills") with the former having faced years of language and citizenship discrimination which recently culminated in a 2007 uprising. Saptari in particular has fragile security, its politics dominated by armed and rival ethnic-based militias that are often accused of involvement in smuggling, abductions and murder. Its local authorities report an inability to move in many areas for fear of attack.
- *Expectations of Support High*: When people are affected by disasters they expect support – if not received then this is fuel added to existing tensions and perceptions of imbalances between communities. People are now good at demanding their rights in Nepal. As can be witnessed by debilitating bandhs, such as those organised by the Koshi Victims Struggle Committee, who closed down all access to the disaster area for up to 20 days at a time.

Some of these issues played a direct part in the response, for example the fact that most of the displaced were Madeshi and most of those responding Pahadi, the politicisation of aid by local parties, the insecurity in Saptari meaning some staff feared to go there to work and government structures hardly existed.

Activisation of the Cluster System

If the one external issue that affected how successful the humanitarian community's response to Koshi, was the challenge of how to respond to this mid to low level disaster in a country with minimal resources and a relatively fragile peace, then the main internal issue was the nature of how the cluster system came to be formalised.

As in most countries the activisation of clusters was built upon already existing work undertaken. The dividing of responsibility for sectors of humanitarian response had already been used in various contexts. It was first discussed during the contingency planning process of 2006 and then in June 2007 clusters had been used to respond to some particular large flooding (although not in this case needing Emergency Shelter.) The draft national DM strategy refers to government aligning itself with the clusters. In 2008 the clusters were used in an new Contingency Planning process facilitated by UNOCHA.

In July of 2008 the RC/HC took this one stage further by suggesting by letter to the IASC in-country that they consider adopting the cluster system on a formal basis, partly to be prepared for future disasters and allow access to certain "global resources." A subsequent meeting of the IASC took place in mid-July where there was at best tepid support for such a cluster formalisation. However, given that in Nepal the RC is also an HC, according to IASC current humanitarian reform policy , clusters should be formalised in all countries where there is an HC and therefore a mission from the HRSU was arranged for August to assist in this formalisation.

This mission coincided with the breaking of the Koshi embankment and flooding of the five VDCs and together they pushed the IASC to formally activate the cluster system. (Following the disaster the RCHC lead a meeting where he asked cluster leads to report back and following this he asked the IFRC take onboard the role of ESC for Koshi.) On the 9th of September the RC/HC wrote to the Emergency Relief Coordinator to inform him that clusters would be set up for "ongoing activities and in its contingency planning for new emergencies." The clusters and lead agencies selected for Nepal were:

- Health – WHO
- Nutrition – UNICEF
- WASH – UNICEF
- Food Security– WFP
- Education in Emergencies – UNICEF
- Protection – OHCHR
- Camp Management (natural disasters) – IOM
- Emergency Telecomunications and Logistics (both WFP) would be

> ### Generic Terms of Reference for Custer Leads at the Country Level, OCHA
>
> -Inclusion of key humanitarian partners
> -Establishment of appropriate coordination mechanisms
> -Coordination with national/local authorities, local civil society.
> -Participatory and community-based approaches
> -Attention to priority cross-cutting issues
> -Needs assessment and analysis
> -Emergency preparedness
> -Planning and strategy development
> -Application of standards
> -Monitoring and reporting
> -Advocacy and resource mobilization
> -Training and capacity building
> -Provision of assistance and services as a last resort

established only in the case of 'major new emergencies.'

- Emergency Shelter was singled out as an issue with IFRC seen as "reluctant to sign on for a standing leadership role." (See page 30 for details.)

According to OCHA it was made quite clear to agency representatives that they were signing up to the full TOR of the cluster system as is globally recognised[14], as indicated in the table of cluster accountability to the Humanitarian Coordinator above, taken from the HRSU website[15].

However interviews with OCHA, key stakeholders in the humanitarian response that included six of the cluster managers, has revealed some key problems that affected the overall response and coordination of that response:

Not Well Understood What Is Being Signed Up For:

It was clear to many that few people understood the work of clusters beyond the capital and not that many there either, despite some initial training and a mission from the HRSU. There is a real question mark over whether clusters are really prepared for what permanent cluster work might be.

Following on from this there is a great sense that agency representatives are not really clear about what they are signing themselves up for in the cluster formalisation. No agency appears to have considered the whole of their new cluster accountabilities to the HC.

Issues and Incompatibilities not Discussed

There are key issues within the formalisation itself and some seeming incompatibilities between a formalised permanent cluster system doing the same work of global clusters on an ongoing basis, that have not as yet been properly discussed. Examples:

- *Levels of External Support*: When to agencies ask for external support? When do they manage on their own?
- *Support to do Cluster Work*: Would they receive support from HQ to undertake the formalised cluster work, or not?
- *Firewall between implementation and coordination*. Would formalised cluster leads retain independence from their agency? How would they do that if they are actually full-time country staff?
- *Existing Structures*: Did the cluster system supersede existing structures or not?

Cluster Approach is not Well Supported

The cluster formalisation is not particular well supported (and further leads to imbalances in response.) Although this should improve over time it is clear agencies are reluctant to have the cluster system formalised. Their comments before Koshi forced the situation included a belief that activisation would:

- Duplicate existing mechanisms in country.

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[14] Reportedly only CCCM made any changes to the global TOR for this process of 'formal activisation.'
[15] See www.humanitarianreform.org.

- Add no particular extra value, extra meetings but little more.
- Exacerbate existing capacity problems.
- Not be needed since there was no need of HQ support.

Cluster Leads Not Really Aware

Meetings with six of the cluster leads have revealed that they are in general quite unprepared for using the cluster approach in disaster response. In what may be partly a disconnect between decisions made by their agency representatives and themselves, the cluster leads have not in general considered the roles and responsibilities, the extra work this might mean nor the extra resources needed to do that work.

An example from one meeting was how the UN staffer had over $100 million of programme planning to annually manage in-country and was seen by her organisation to be a cluster coordinator as well. There had been almost no internal discussion within their agency as to what this meant for this person and their workload, which might include disasters such as Koshi, preparedness activities, recovery activities and continuing with their own workload.

Perhaps particularly worrying was the belief that it would be 'business as usual' by several cluster leads, which would certainly appear to undermine the idea that their agencies have signed them up to this particular set of cluster accountabilities.

Lack of Real Government Involvement in Cluster Formalisation

The cluster formalisation endorsed by the CNDRC (and as mentioned is contained within the new DM strategy that has as yet not been ratified by government) does not appear to cover over some key issues:

- The government does not really understand the whole remit of the cluster system, the role of external activated teams from Geneva based humanitarian agencies, the differing roles of permanent formalised clusters in Nepal etc. It was pretty clear that senior government authorities interviewed talked of the cluster system but did not really understand.
- The endorsement by the CNDRC does not address key issues for cluster engagement with the government, especially the alignment with ministries. How do the 8 formalised clusters link with the 21 Nepalese ministries? For example the Ministry of Physical Planning has three clusters (shelter, WASH and camp management) counterparts.
- Following on from this it appears that almost no government work in cluster development has been done by government except that prompted by individual clusters themselves.
- It is not widely known that the government had formally endorsed the cluster system; several of those interviewed claimed that it had not yet been endorsed.

Clearly there is some work to do with clusters and government, firstly on the government's understanding of clusters at senior central, regional and local levels. The challenge for government is balancing that with those many other priorities.

Leadership of the Response

An aspect of the evaluation affecting the overall response to Koshi was a seeming lack of sustained leadership across the work. Given the government's relative weakness in coordination the United Nations took much of a central position and its leadership should to be examined, especially in light of the use of the cluster system.

The evaluation has shown that whilst there is some evidence of the usual generic and perhaps too-easy criticism of disaster coordination, there has been uneven UN leadership which has affected the response. Examples of where it was felt the UN should have done more (some identified by both OCHA and the RC/HC themselves) include:

- *Emphasis*: There lacked a clear understanding about what kind of priority Koshi was or an agreement between IASC leads about what kind of level of support should be provided.
- *Accountability*: Agency representatives should have been made accountable for their inability to meet cluster commitments.
- *Cross-Cluster Activities*: Not enough meetings just between cluster leads arranged – they were generally not separated out from IASC meetings. Meetings that did take place did not address key issues.
- *Cross-Cutting Issues*: A lack of concerted approach. Non-existent for the environment and age and hiv/aids as well as gender reflected only in the health sector.
- *Capital Based*: The structure was based too much on the capital (an oft-heard criticism) –some clusters did not visit the field and relied on some reportedly dubious sources of information for policy making.

To the UN's credit this criticism has already been internalised, by both the RC/HC and OCHA. Whilst acknowledging the difficulty to gauge a proper response to Koshi (which affected many actors) they do see uneven leadership as causing some key problems. It is also recognised that the RC/HC made "a conscious decision to not eclipse the GON in their leadership and coordination."

It should be noted that this whole issue is of course complicated by the intricacy of the general RC/HC relationship to UN agencies, where the RC/HC coordination rather than management is further complicated by having these UN agencies as cluster leads. In summary to this one could argue that whilst overall coordination of the response has been good the manner in which the clusters were formalised has in part undermined that coordination. Some of those interviewed have expressed an opinion that it is the lack of commitment of cluster lead agencies that has been a root problem.

Context Overview And Recommendations

Clearly the key challenge of Koshi has been how to gauge a proper response, how to work on a mid-level disaster where country capacity was probably not enough, where the Disaster Management model and capacity of the Nepali government is weak and where new conflict could be sparked by a mismanaged response[16].

In response to Koshi the cluster system was activated (and furthermore formalised as the future structure) but there are strong doubts about whether or not this has been a success. The cluster system appears to

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[16] Several actors even questioned the focus on Koshi, suggesting that it was over-emphasised to the detriment of other issues such as the Western flooding and land-slides.

have been dropped on top of the Koshi response without an adequate understanding or commitment to it from all actors; it is as if it was felt the system would manage itself. The further exacerbated the problems of the manner in which the cluster system had been set up, allowing some clusters to work without commitment and without guarantee that they were actually doing the work. It was clusters themselves that interpreted what they should do for Koshi rather than it being agreed and driven from the centre. An argument could be made that the manner in which clusters were formalised has challenged the leadership and the coordination of the response.

There has been however some excellent work done and some sectors have been particularly well covered; there has also been no report of any disastrous humanitarian need unmet. Clusters have been said to have "created a good environment to work" and "laid out a proper structure of response." There are certainly no reports of a complete breakdown in coordination; if there have been problems they have been managed. There have however been some serious issues, some of which were either caused or not helped by the way the cluster system was managed. These included amongst other things a serious disconnect between the capital and the field, the development of parallel response systems, and a serious imbalance in the work of clusters.

The formalisation of clusters also needs some serious work. Government remains committed to the approach but only in broad terms without much work done by it to integrate it within its own structures. The RC/HC commented that the cluster approach "has not yet been fully understood or integrated into the current government" but "the proposed National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management in Nepal, currently awaiting endorsement, commits the GON to align its structures with the cluster approach."

Clusters remain however not an answer to all problems and ask a range of further questions which if not addressed can make humanitarian response worse, not better, as has perhaps in part occurred in this case. There remains at present no plan in Nepal for cluster development beyond the very general TOR used to guide temporary global clusters when activated; this has no doubt added to a lack of focus on agency priority and commitment to the clusters generally. It has certainly affected and continues to affect the development of clusters which are committed, with questions of work-planning, staffing, costing remaining quite unknown. There needs to be a more robust model of leadership for the clusters to work and the Federation should work with OCHA and the RC/HC in that regard.

RECOMMENDATIONS: GLOBAL CLUSTER

1) *Conflict Analysis in Deployments*: When considering deployment, include a detailed analysis of how a lack or particular scale of response may contribute to existing conflict or create conflict between authorities and communities or between communities themselves.

2) *RC/HC Protocols*: Work with OCHA at a global level to examine accountabilities to RC/HC in cluster responses, to ensure that all clusters are treated the same in the field, their work examined at the same levels and each held accountable to the same standards.

3) *Deployment Flexibility*: Continue a flexible approach to deployments. Small disasters do not mean good coordination; there always remains the possibility of need which the Geneva cluster with a flexible approach can fill.

4) *Cluster and Emergency Shelter Training in Key Countries*: Go through key disaster-prone countries and train carefully IFRC and NRCS on general cluster roles and responsibilities, as we;;as ,pre detail on the work of the ESC.

 5) *Permanent Cluster Establishment*: Continue to push for clarity in the area of the establishment of permanent cluster (of whatever kind) and how they relate to the global humanitarian cluster system.

RECOMMENDATIONS: IFRC NEPAL

12) *General Capacity Building*: Continue and deepen work with government and NRCS to build internal capacity at all levels and within all programming.

13) *Conflict Prediction*: OHCHR is developing scenarios for early warning for violence including scenarios such as Koshi. IFRC should tap into this for understanding at what levels shelter can be managed internally and where external support is best sought.

14) *Permanent Cluster Issues*:

   a. Cluster Planning: Work with the IASC, OCHA and the RC/HC to develop full and complete plans for cluster formalisation that are adopted by all cluster leads, and from that make plans that details a schedule of activities, targets, staffing and other costs etc.

   b. *Cluster Balance*: Advocate locally to ensure that all responses to disasters are of the same level by all clusters. Work together with OCHA to ensure that the IASC (and the HC) hold everyone to account by the same level.

   c. *Cluster Training*: IFRC to support OCHA in a more thorough dispersal of info on clusters, both pre disaster in appropriately targeted districts, but certainly in disasters themselves. This should be a real understanding linked to government ownership of the system.

   d. *Meetings*: Work with OCHA and others within the IASC to streamline and rationalise disaster response meetings within the cluster system. Urge for regular meetings of cluster leads.

   e. *Alignment*: Work with OCHA, the IASC and government to better align clusters with ministries.

15) *General Coordination Development:*

   a. *Leadership*: Advocate with the RC/HC and OCHA that appropriate levels of leadership be maintained at both central and local levels during all phases of the disaster.

   b. *Transition/Early Recovery*: Advocate for complete and detailed transitions from humanitarian to recovery programming and coordination.

   c. *Civil Society*: Advocate for stronger recognition and consideration of Nepali civil society humanitarian aid during disaster response.

16) *Disaster Management Streamlining*: Work with all actors to create a more streamlined disaster management response in lieu of the new DM act and strategy coming into force..

ACTIVISATION OF THE SHELTER CLUSTER

The Process of Activisation

<u>Introduction: Lead-Up to Activisation:</u>

The Federation was already in a relatively good position to respond to a need to manage cluster coordination before the activisation of the global cluster. The NRCS was already the main implementer of shelter relief in Nepal as well as the largest responder overall in natural disasters and has strong links with government and other actors from central through to local community levels. The IFRC delegation had provided various elements of technical support to the NRCS in shelter and other related areas over previous years and through the contingency planning process had developed strong relationships with key actors such as UN-Habitat, shelter implementing partners as well as with the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) under the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works.

As early as the IASC contingency planning process of 2007 (which was based on an earthquake scenario and already had broken down planning into clusters) the IFRC had started to examine capacity inside itself and NRSC to see how it could manage Emergency Shelter coordination within country.

In this environment arrived the Koshi flood and the move for formalisation of clusters. The immediate challenge for the Federation was how to respond. A rough time-line of the decision-making process highlights these questions and the conclusions drawn:

- Koshi disaster. At first the depth of the need took time to gauge. Eventually the HC looked for responders for shelter.
- The IFRC internally considers its position, felt that the NRCS is strong enough to respond with IFRC support. Options considered such as remote support from Geneva.
- IFRC informed the HC that there would be no global cluster roll-out, without HC or government formal request.
- The UNDAC and HRSU missions prompt the HC (through the IASC) to decide that clusters are formalised, i.e. they are the way coordination for disasters will function for Koshi and beyond.
- IFRC reacts by sending a coordination team but with a relatively light approach, where capacity building would be the overall goal. It also considers the ramifications of agreeing a stand-by role in a formalised cluster system.

> "In Nepal, the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction under the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works will be the focal department for coordination in the area of emergency shelter. As the convener of the emergency shelter cluster during natural disasters, the IFRC will co-ordinate the international humanitarian response in the area of emergency shelter after major natural disasters; UN-HABITAT will provide technical assistance for it. "
> *Emergency Shelter Contingency Plan 2008*

- A letter from the RC/HC to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) signalled a formal confirmation that the cluster system had been formalised but unlike other clusters IFRC would only work for Koshi.

The correspondence and discussions with both internal and external actors reveal the process of activisation was complex and linked to many factors, some specific to the Federation and its mandate but many connected to processes outside of its direct control. In part the background relative strength of the

Federation's position to coordinate shelter was just one part of the picture. Other elements that went into the activisation decision-making include the contextual issues already highlighted in the previous section:

1) The challenge in gauging a correct response to this mid-level disaster
2) The general weakness of the government's dm system.
3) The process of general cluster activisation, of which the ESC is a part.

Further internal Federation questions that also played a key part in the response included:

1) The capacity of and appropriateness of having NRCS manage coordination as well as its own implementation during a disaster.
2) NRCS reluctance to accept more external actors, new delegates, which is a sensitive subject to many strong National Societies.
3) The Head of Delegation's desire to create some kind of permanent response capacity for shelter coordination within a combination of the IFRC/NRCS[17] and UN-Habitat.

The Letter of the RC/HC to the UN ERC

The 9th of September letter of the RC/HC to the UN ERC which indicated the IASC Nepal had decided to formalise the cluster system highlighted the Emergency Shelter as "an area that requires further discussion." It was noted that IFRC had lead the contingency planning process but was "reluctant to sign on for standing leadership role given its limited in-country resources." It had however "agreed to 'activate' their leadership for this cluster in light of the scale of this current emergency" (Koshi.)

The Federation at Geneva has expressed a degree of dissatisfaction in the formal attention thrown on what appears to be their 'reluctance' to fully respond in a manner which the RC/HC was looking for; they feel such publicity is against the spirit of partnership within humanitarian reform and also feel it added unnecessary pressure to a already complex decision-making process. Perhaps of particular importance to the Federation was that the letter implied a criticism about the level of commitment it in general had for the cluster approach in Nepal. This criticism was felt even more during the life of the response given the reports that the performance of the Federation's Emergency Shelter Cluster was good in comparison to some of the other UN-managed clusters.

Humanitarian Reform and the ESC

The letter and the Nepal scenario may actually highlight more important issues.

There are some clear problematic areas for the Emergency Shelter Cluster as it stands within current developments within the cluster system and humanitarian reform, and secondly, this has implications for the future of the IFRC work both within and outside of disasters. Core to this is a perceived series of incompatibilities between the global cluster system and the current push to have a formalised cluster system at country level, part of this drive being the need to have this formalisation wherever there is a permanent

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[17] It was felt there was a major benefit in having a country representative who knew of the Humanitarian reform process and also that it was their responsibility to deliver on it and was supported in this by their line-manager at a regional level.. They knew it was part of their job; however it is not directly indicated in their or any other Head of Delegation TOR, something which should be addressed.

Humanitarian Coordinator. (There are clearly questions of humanitarian reform in general, differences between global clusters and what permanent or formalised clusters in-countries mean, including the work needed to balance these; these questions are beyond the scope of this report.)

The activisation process and the letter to the ERC reveal at core a clash of motivations and needs between key actors – in this case the RC/HC and the Global Emergency Shelter Cluster – a clash that helps us examine how the IFRC convened Emergency Shelter Cluster is challenged by having permanent clusters.

RC/HC Position

- The RC/HC (in part urged by the HRSU in Geneva) is looking for a permanent cluster presence for Emergency shelter, not just in current disasters.
- The RC/HC needs to have some kind of response available for mid and lower-level disasters. If the Federation won't do the work then who will?
- The internal debate within the IFRC on how it would respond to a permanent activisation and certainly the final response that it would not (the initial response) was construed to be a general reluctance to be held to be accountable on a permanent basis.

Federation Position

- The IFRC ESC unit are looking to respond within their institutional mandate and within the agreement with OCHA that it will convene the global emergency shelter cluster.
- The ESC do not in general roll out in mid or lower-level disasters; that is left to national capacity.
- The Federation sees the RC/HC has misinterpreted the nature of the cluster system by mixing two separate systems – the global humanitarian clusters with some kind of permanent presence aligned by cluster.

The global issue for IFRC is that it is reluctant to have a permanent role for cluster coordination with a permanent accountability to an RC/HC. The reluctance is not because it does not see the importance of key aspects within the drive to formal permanent clusters, areas of preparedness or capacity building etc but rather the complexities of the ESC and of IFRC itself within the cluster system. Why is the ESC a particular challenge when considering a formal permanent role in-country?

1) *The ESC only responds for 'this' disaster*[18]: The Emergency Shelter Cluster is unlike other clusters in the global system and cannot be easily compared for like for like in terms of its structure nor its response. The key issue is that the ESC only responds during the emergency phase, as indicated above. IFRC coordinates "the provision of basic and immediate shelter needs[19]"and it specifically does not do transitional or permanent housing. It hands over the work of coordination to another actor for recovery, usually UN-Habitat. It is the only cluster to do this[20]. How then to construct a permanent stand-by status for a shelter cluster when they do not work permanently?

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[18] Another different between the ESC and other clusters is that it has a division of duties between natural disaster and conflict with UNHCR, but that feature is shared also by the Camp Management Cluster which is shared between IOM and UNHCR.

[19] MOU between IFRC and OHCA on Emergency Shelter Coordination for Natural Disasters.

[20] With WASH for example UNICEF is expected to do all the work from disaster through to recovery, it is expected to be permanently available. Whilst it may not be the same staff that respond in recovery (surge capacity having returned home) UNICEF is still in charge.

2) *An Incompatible Mandate?*: The IFRC is not part of the UN and although the Emergency Shelter Cluster falls within the general leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, the IFRC does not report to it; its internal stake-holders are very different. The mandate of the ESC as seen within the MOU between the UN and IFRC is clear that the Federation will only work within the cluster response within the emergency phase and only when it decides when to respond. How can the ESC have a permanent stand-by status perpetually reporting to the RC/HC?

3) *National Society Role Confusion?*: Connected to mandate is the issue of the role of the NS in any formalised cluster system, since the role of the National Societies is intimately tied into the role of the Federation. The proposed formalisation of the system in Nepal suggests international organisations leading. Yet the Federation is made up of its members, the national societies, and the Federation delegation in-country gives support to build national capacity. Will a stronger role for the NRCS go against that formalisation, calling into question those key areas of cluster response: neutrality, impartiality, independence? Secondly, if the NRCS does lead cluster coordination, even up to mid-level disasters, will there not be a power dynamic set up, with all the other cluster leads being international staff of international agencies

One of the ramifications of this is that it this mismatch in cluster response to disasters may feed back into any cluster imbalances already in place. As an example when an ESC team is deployed it knows it is only working for a short time on these issues and it has a period of usually three months to complete its work. It works flat out to do that. UN agencies that have large staff in-country are in it for the long haul. There is a possibility that if they are not lead centrally, and tasked alike to respond to a disaster that they may not respond like the ESC.

Staffing[21]

Naturally the composition of the Emergency Shelter unit was based on the various contextual aspects of Koshi as well as the process itself that lead to an eventual agreement with the UN RC/HC on a deployment.

During this period several modalities of response were discussed including the provision of remote support from Geneva, a one-person only deployment and the final mixed capacity-building model finally chosen. This process included work done by the Geneva Shelter Department on various adapted terms of reference as well as their contacting of members of the ESC roster to request they stand-by for possible deployment to the field.

The final decision on having a deployment was made formally on the 8th of September. Geneva reactions to this were slightly delayed by its own capacity issues (key personnel were on holiday and there is a key post of Shelter Coordination Team Officer as yet unfilled) but much of the preparations had already been made during the three-week decision-making process. Given that there was no other activisation of the global cluster at this moment – although Honduras was considered for a few days – there was little pressure on staffing capacity for the mission itself.

Staffing of the Deployment

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[21] An additional person also arrived from the IFRC Kuala Lumpur office to assist with the NS as it had relatively weak systems for such an unusually strong disaster.

The overall rationale spelt out by the various internal stakeholders though not expressed clearly in the mission TOR, is that due to the various contextual questions raised, the scale of the disaster etc, this mission would also be geared towards training. In fact capacity building within both the ESC team and NRCS were stated as the main component of the mission. This naturally dictated the nature of the team.

The ESC team was made up of six members who were almost always not working at the same time.

- *Trainer/Coordinator*: The Federation felt that this was a perfect opportunity for a senior roster consultant to mentor a trained member of the team who had not yet done the actual work of coordination in a disaster setting; he was chosen specially due to his experience of large disasters, recently cyclones Sidr and Nargis.
- *Coordinator/Trainee*: The trainee was selected to have experience of coordination in a relatively reduced pressure environment, giving exposure to someone already trained by the Global Cluster but who had not lead a cluster response. A Spanish speaker was selected, given the need to train up suitable coordinators for

> ### Regional Input into the ESC?
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> This was talked about by many Federation stakeholders in the process and it is clearly something that needs development. There appears a lack of clarity on exactly what is the role of the Regional IFRC offices and ESC deployment. Is it decision-making or resource support?
>
> One member of the ESC team suggested that the regional office 'should' get involved in ESC deployment but they do not, partly because it is not sure what they may add. One of the ESC coordinators wondered what exactly they might get from the IFRC at regional offices. Certainly deployment issues are almost always only conducted – as in the case of Nepal and Koshi –by Head of Delegations directly with the Geneva shelter team.

Latin America. Once again this decision was in part due to the nature of the disaster, where it was felt that the less intense nature of it (compared to Cyclone Sidr for example) allowed more space for training on the job.
- *Information Manager*: Seconded by Netherlands Red Cross, the Information Manager was also new to a Emergency Shelter Coordination Team; the reduced intensity of Koshi again allowing such a deployment.
- *National Field IM Officer x2*: The tasks of the Information Field Officer were to attend meetings, lobby officials, and coordinate and obtain core shelter information. They were hired through the NRCS, as part of the NRCS capacity building, since it was hoped that these staff would be retained by the NS once the cluster work had been completed.
- *Technical Advisor:* Habitat for Humanity wanted to be involved in the disaster response but had little funding and not a strong mandate for emergency work. As they were enthusiastic and had good technical knowledge the shelter cluster hired one of their experts to assist with technical issues; they worked on advice to implementing partners and government and provided input into recovery designs.

Problems Identified

Although aspects of staffing obviously worked – recruitment went relatively quickly once decisions were made, deployed team members were motivated, new ESC staff had new experiences etc – there were clearly issues related to staffing and a lot of these are inter-related. For example a lack of continuity affected perceptions of roles and responsibilities, the unclear roles and responsibilities and the lack of a detailed handover impacted on the capacity building etc.

Continuity Issues: This has been identified as a key issue for the ESC deployment, though not as serious as the Tajikistan deployment.

- The trainer/coordinator arrived and almost immediately left for a shelter meeting in Geneva together with the Head of Delegation. This made the first week of the coordinator/trainee much more difficult than it could have been as well as immediately challenged the capacity building component of the mission. It also meant the Information Manager spent much of his first two weeks on coordination related issues rather than developing an IM system.
- Internal handovers were problematic and there was confusion. The coordinator/trainee felt it was limited whilst others of the team felt it was sufficient. Clear guidance and an established protocol for handovers would be very useful.
- The trainee/coordinator left after only one month which actually left little time for coordination or training for coordination.
- It was felt by some that the trainer/coordinator (who ultimately did the work) needed to be in-country for a longer period to provide continuity. There were claims that the 'early departure' impacted on the work of the coordination, with a loss of both momentum and institutional memory. Some suggested that there was a serious gap in coordination after the coordinator left, with UN-Habitat not really present either at field of capital levels e.g. winterisation stopped.

Roles and Responsibilities Unclear

- The TOR for the coordinator/trainee states that he was responsible for the coordination (supported and guided by the trainer/coordinator) when in actual fact the latter did almost all the work This was not planned but decided internally by the deployed team on the return from Geneva of the trainer/coordinator, especially as the trainee/coordinator was already soon due to leave the field.
- This had the affect of confusing some actors. One person mentioned that they did not know understand the relationship between trainee and trainer coordinators – they were seemingly inter-changeable but it was not clear.
- Another person commented on how they felt that the coordinator/trainee was the only coordinator and that the trainer/coordinator was an advisor, then when the former left, the advisor took over.

National Staff Recruitment Delayed: The recruitment of staff through the NRCS was problematic on a number of levels.

- The IM officers were not contracted until 15th October, nearly two full months after the disaster. This is clearly far too long for an emergency deployment of any kind, and impaired the ability of the ESC to work in the particularly important early period.
- A knock-on effect was the impact on capacity building, reducing much of the time that the trainer/coordinator and the IM manager had for both internal and NRCS development – they were involved with more junior tasks usually covered by these locally recruited staff.
- Finally this recruitment process continued the confusion within the NRCS as to the role of the ESC and its supposed independence to the IFRC and NRCS.

Several of the internal stakeholders had reservations of using deployments as training. The overall effect of these inter-connected issues was that the capacity building was marginalised by staffing issues. It could be

argued that if good came from the training component of the mission it was somewhat despite the staffing rather than because of it, especially given the lack of objectives, work-plan etc.

Administration and Logistics Support for the Mission

Administrative and logistical support for the mission was provided either through the Geneva unit, by the IFRC/NRCS offices and staff in Nepal, or directly by the team themselves.

Office-Space was provided by the Federation in Kathmandu. Computers and communications equipment were brought in by one of the staff members from Geneva. Vehicles were hired locally by the ESC team with support from IFRC. Otherwise they had support with vehicles from IFRC or NRCS. One member of the team said "practical support by NRCS and IFRC were vital for a good start."

In general it was felt that there was nothing that was needed that could not be obtained and that support was always there.

There was however some confusion within both contracts and staff advances. With the former some staff arrived in country without any contract at all and were only issued much later, which must be addressed, especially as these emergency contexts demand that staff are purely occupied with their life-saving labours. With advances the Federation office in Nepal was at first told it could not issue them as mistakes had been made in the Myanmar deployment; this created unnecessary work and delays in an emergency situation.

The National Society and the Emergency Shelter Cluster

Background: The National Society

The National Society of the Red Cross in Nepal is well known and well-respected throughout the country and it has reportedly a strong capacity for humanitarian work, especially for relief distributions, and as is commonly the case it has a strong district-level network of staff and volunteers. It also has a reputation beyond Nepal of being one of the strongest national societies in the region.

Given the weakness of government disaster management structures (and the weakness in governance in general) the NS has been the near de facto humanitarian responder on behalf of government. A standard response to disaster is that the Ministry of Home Affairs would call a meeting of key players whereupon the NRCS would be asked to do the actual work of humanitarian relief. In what was called a one-door policy all organisations were asked to channel their work through the NRCS, especially for any distributions of non-food items[22], which would then coordinate the distribution.

In response to the Koshi disaster the NRCS was one of the first responders and quickly took over distributions in Sunsari. After a few weeks it reported that it had at least one person in each of the camps both on the Sunsari and Saptari side of the still-flowing flood. They were also said to be one of the few organisations to get vehicles through the frequent bandhs which occurred during the response.

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[22] It should be noted that this one-door arrangement is not a formal system – there remain different interpretations by different actors. It also faces some criticism; some members of the humanitarian community feel that the one-door policy does not result in efficient response and point out how in areas where NGOs were strong, its presence could be leveraged for humanitarian response, rather than relying solely on the NRCS for distribution.

Despite this work it has been commented on by some that the NRCS relied too much on people and less on a strong system. When the Disaster Management Director left for Myanmar much of the good work already done unravelled, with a lack of ability at district level in particular to take key decisions once made by this person and a lack of good communications with the central level to make up for the loss of decision-making locally.

Secondly the ability of NRCS to work with international actors on an equal footing (where they are just one of the many implementing bodies) within the cluster system has been called into question by the Koshi flooding. The chairman of the Sunsari district chapter admitted this change from the one-door system to coordination and implementation on an equal footing with others has come as something as a challenge.

Several actors felt the NRCS work locally was at best uneven and needed much more central supervision. More worryingly perhaps was the suggestion by several respondents that the NRCS much too close to government at a local level (with suggestions of political influence in distributions); one person said the NS were "arrogant" because of this close relationship.

> "It was clear from the outset that the previous one-door strategy of everybody giving everything to the National Society of the Red Cross would not work for Koshi."
> *Cluster Lead*

Capacity Building and NRCS

In terms of process the conversation of the role of the National Society within the response to Koshi eventually rolled into a component for capacity building. It was the Executive Director of NRCS (a trained shelter coordinator within the global cluster) who first approached the Head of Delegation of the Federation with the idea there be such a component. They discussed that the best way forward would be that the director would work directly with the ESC's team. During the work of the cluster; this idea however never materialized, as the director's capacities were fully absorbed by the NRCS operation. In addition, as discussions moved on, the Geneva ESC unit felt the need for a firewall between implementation and coordination and this there necessitated the deployment of an independent cluster team with a capacity building component for the NRCS.

The decision to have an ESC team in place, which acknowledged a lack of capacity, was seen as a chance to further build NRCS capacity in emergency shelter coordination

Problematic Relations with the ESC

However the arrangement of capacity building whilst a disaster was ongoing had some serious implications for how that training and development functioned. In fact it could be argued that the nature of this particular relationship made relations between the ESC and the National Society unusually strained.

Issues identified as part of the evaluation and by quite a few of those interviewed, include:

- *Lack of Independence*: The closer than usual relationship with NRCS affected the independence of the ESC, recognised by many respondents. Several actors pointed out the issue of the relationship between the ESC and the NRCS. The NRCS asked the question "where should the person doing shelter be responsible to?" and added that "they (the cluster staff) could not forget they were Red Cross people."
- *National Staff NRCS or Not*: The recruitment of ESC national staff by the NRCS clearly just added to this confusion. One person suggested even the staff themselves did not appear to know who they worked for. Furthermore these staff actually had better conditions than NRCS staff in the field which created unnecessary tensions given that other NRCS staff felt they were all working for the same organisation.
- *ESC Too Much Like the UN*: The NRCS felt the ESC was too close to the UN and this compromised the Federation mandate. The "IFRC [through the ESC] cannot be a wing of the United Nations, but it can be linked."
- *Disagreement on procedures*: There was disagreement between the NRCS and the ESC on standards of work (*sphere* guidelines especially) and modalities of work (for example when during family movement should relief items be given.)
- *Obvious Tensions*: Other actors noticed the tension between NRCS and the ESC, one person commented, "when the ESC was having meetings the senior NRCS staff seemed to disappear."
- *Government Misunderstandings*: The Ministry of Home Affairs was not really sure of the separate global nature of the ESC work and felt it was part of IFRC and linked to NRCS.

> "The National Society was absolutely the only organisation to be able to move at the height of the worst political disturbances. This has to be considered."
> *Shelter Implementing Partner*

Reasons for Problems

In general terms the confusion caused by a change of system (from one-door to cluster) which challenged its traditional lead role, is mixed with a more general dissatisfaction of not being in the lead anymore and being just one actor coordinated by an ESC team that it felt at core should be both supporting it and/or reporting to it. Other reasons for problems include:

- *Inadequate Planning and Focus*: *An email from the IFRC stated* t*hat "the mis*sion will be very focused in capacity building to the national society" but it was not. There was a lack of adequate planning for training and development. *There were no detailed plans o*f *action and* documentation on this core aspect of the mission was limited to a few lines in the trainer/coordinator's TOR.. Taken together this made it very challenging for the coordinator to balance training with actual coord*ination.*
- *No Counterpart: Overload or Unwillingness*: The NRCS did not provide a counterpart for the coordination capacity building. On the one hand it was suggested that the NRCS capacity was fully absorbed by their own operation, admitted as much be senior NRCS staff, who feel so much is expected of them by so many stakeholders: "how can we free up staff for training?" On the other hand it was suggested that there was also a lack of willingness shown by the NRCS to actually receive training in coordination.

- *Weak Understanding of Humanitarian Reform[23]*: This is particularly evident at district level where responses to questions on the subject obtained obvious repetitions of key cluster-related words without the concomitant understanding of what it meant.

- *Against basic Federation principles*: There is the feeling from the NRCS that at some core level the ESC goes against the basic principles of the member organisations role in the Federation. A senior member of the National Society asked the question: "Does the ESC include the National Society role at Global level?" which suggests on the one hand a lack of understanding of the complex relationship between national societies and their input into decisions made on the global shelter cluster. Certainly the NRCS felt that if the Federation's has a global role then its operation should include all those aspects of the Federation: i.e. the National Societies.

> "This is not the time for capacity building."
> *Member of the ESC*

- *NRCS Felt Responsible*: Although the NRCS had recognised it did not have the capacity to coordinate the emergency shelter response during Koshi there was still a strong feeling of responsibility for non-food relief item and emergency shelter coordination of such a disaster, and there was difficulty in letting go its lead role, which was practised during previous (but smaller) natural disasters in Nepal. One member of the IFRC team deployed to Nepal stated that "the NS wanted the ESC to sit in their office and report to them."

- *External/internal*: In similar vein to that identified in imbalances in clusters there was a strong feeling in the NRCS that the ESC were external actors who did not know the Nepal context (which of course is true) and the ESC's reluctance to work closely with the NS was perceived as a further undercutting the value of national/local knowledge.

> "We have to be very clear on the role of IFRC itself. When IFRC takes the role of coordination the NRCS feels that the ESC needs to be close to the National Society and that it should be written inside the TOR."
> *Nepal Red Cross Society*

- *Shelter not Programmatic*: For the NRCS shelter is somewhat problematic because it is a response tool not an actual programme, so it is picked up and then put down again, and this has tended to limit the development of both implementation and coordination.

- *Semantics*: What is impartial and independent? The NRCS feel one of their advantages it that they are never partial and never dependent on others. This is one of their core strengths. Why therefore do they need external experts in such things?

- *Criticism from Within*: The NRCS did not like someone that they felt was within the IFRC publicly criticising them for working standards and methodology. "During one meeting they [the NS] were asked for information by the ESC team and they did not have it and they were upset at what they felt was a public embarrassment from within their own ranks."

Information Management Component

The Information Management component of the building of capacity appeared to work much better, probably because there was active involvement from the National Society. The information manager worked through the two national staff hired by the national society and trained them for future work; both are still

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[23] Several Federation members suggested this is an issue for many national societies across the region – that they do not understand the cluster system before suddenly having to deal with it in a disaster setting; detailed training of key NS in particularly disaster-prone countries would be useful.

working in related areas, one is the reporting officer for the NRCS and the other still works for the now-UN-Habitat lead shelter cluster. The Information Manager also worked closely with a NRCS counterpart and handed over tools/methodologies which included elements of gap analysis, tracking commodities, the Google groups website use etc (work that was followed up by the coordinator/trainer) after his departure.)

The Future: Formalised Emergency Shelter Cluster for Nepal?

It is clear from other cluster leads interviewed that the implication of having permanent clusters has not been thought through in much detail as yet. There are some great expectations being placed on organisations that are not really understood. To its credit the Federation has already internalised much of these questions and has started the process of looking to see what its future might be in a permanent formalised cluster in Nepal. It has also recognised that its work in Nepal has some implications for the global Federation position of not working on shelter beyond a 'pure and current' emergency.

IFRC Nepal is clearly enthusiastic in a desire to lead some kind of sustainable role in emergency shelter cluster – they have already lead the new ESC Contingency Planning process and are seen as a trusted actor by implementing partners and government. In an analysis of the possibilities for the establishment of a permanent cluster the trainer/coordinator of the ESC suggested an IFRC/UN-Habitat joint venture, which makes sense given the disaster/recovery split roles within shelter on a global level. The revision of the contingency plan in early 2009 has acknowledged the lack of coordination on a permanent basis in the country.

However, as internal discussions within the Federation continued through September and October the challenges of having a position within this formalised system (mentioned earlier in this section of the report) remained. It is clear the Federation had to be careful not to be 'stung' into making an incorrect response to the ERC letter which indicates its 'reluctance' to respond. Could it find a place within a model like the Philippines[24]?

Advantages:

- *Country Capacity*: A permanent cluster could handle up to mid-level emergencies without needing of expensive, time-consuming deployment of external expertise.
- *Permanent Leadership Established and Recognised*.
- *International Support*: It has support from the INGO community.
- *Better Preparations*: It was felt by many that a permanent leadership role by someone would improve preparations. There could be work on quality and standards of shelter items, sourcing of country-available materials, etc.
- *Global Tools Used Locally*: information management, coordination etc.
- *Government Support*: Authorities on all levels support the idea of a permanent cluster (although knowledge of exactly what that might mean is less strong). Several respondents mentioned the endorsement of the CNDRC and felt the government saw the clusters as the way forward.
- *Continuing and Deepening Institutional Knowledge*.

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[24] "We are hoping for an eventual outcome similar to how the clusters have been adopted in the Philippines by the disaster authority." Humanitarian Coordinator.

- *Training and Sector Development*: The training of participating organisations will build national capacity.
- *Donor Support*: Some evidence of support to formalisation if it is linked to prepositioning, maintenance of response standards, standardisation of relief packages.

Challenges:

- *Mandate*: Beyond an actual disaster should the IFRC do this? Should it be permanently accountable to the formalised cluster system?
- *Added Value/Clarity of Purpose*: Isn't this work being done anyway by existing actors? Will this replace national and especially government capacity? At the very least the system could impede government DM planning if not done well.
- *Resources*:
  - *Staffing*: Long term needs might be capacity building, distribution training, contingency planning, all taking time and effort. Where will the human resources be found?
  - *Funding*: Global funding for standing cluster response is unlikely. There is a need for in-country donors which is problematic given that donors are already locked into relatively rigid patterns of aid.
- *Firewall*: There is a need for a greater understanding of the complexity of organisations implementing and coordinating at the same time.
- *Government*: Needs more than wordy endorsements from key staff. It needs understanding and tasking down to local levels, especially of the DUDBC.
- *Half a Sector Development*: UNHCR which is supposed to manage conflict related shelter need is not engaged in the cluster process in Nepal. Both the Federation and OCHA have requested HCR's presence for contingency planning etc to no success, which has implications for the IFRC and certainly for the work of shelter as a sector. Unanswered questions include inter alia a) Should contingency planning be done completely separately for disaster and conflict response? b) What support is offered by the IFRC to UNHCR (and vice versa) in the wake of a particularly huge need?

> "I expect the IFRC to remain engaged, although I recognise it is not a full-time role at this stage. IFRC support in contingency planning for the shelter cluster, ensuring coordination (especially with the government) is needed. It will be too late to bring in external capacity if a major disaster hits, such as the earthquake scenario. We need the linkages and the preparedness in place, on the ground, now."
> *Humanitarian Coordinator*

NRCS and a Permanent Cluster:

The biggest challenge for any formalised permanent cluster internally within the Federation in Nepal is probably how this interacts with the current lead role of the National Society during natural disasters which are below the level of an international humanitarian response, but require a cluster response based on the HC's request.

The NRCS and the Federation clearly feel that it is they that should continue doing the coordination for national level (i.e. small and medium size) disasters. The NRCS point to the fact that in the past they have been responsible for coordination on a national level, although they admit that it was not up to the standard that the global cluster demands. There are obviously some other advantages in their leadership, their long-

standing reputation in the country, their knowledge of the field, an organisational structure down to local levels. As one person said, "the strength of the Red Cross is the National Society."

Note that if there is a major emergency, such as an earthquake in Kathmandu valley, then a full Shelter Team Deployment would be needed. This is understood by all actors. The challenge for the IFRC is to find a solution in-country to a push to a formalised cluster system where they have external (IFRC and global cluster mandate) as well as internal (NRCS questions) issues to manage if it wishes to be a coordinator of some kind of permanent cluster.

The Decision So Far

Subsequent to the bulk of this report being written the Federation Nepal has confirmed to the RC/HC that it will assume a permanent coordination role for emergency shelter.

Though in a development stage a concept note has been prepared which indicates IFRC Nepal's willingness to lead a permanent emergency shelter cluster and at the same time build up the capacity of the National Society in its operational capacity. This will build up the capacity

Part of the Federation's responsibility as permanent cluster lead will be building the capacity of the National Society to respond to the standard of the global cluster demands and to become a coordination lead recognised by the other international cluster leads.

One of the key challenges is that at present the only guide to the formalisation is the general global cluster Terms of Reference. There remains no detailed plan for cluster development and it is difficult to decide exactly how much human and funding resources to apply to the work.

(Contact IFRC Nepal for the full concept note).

Handover

Given that the Federation's Shelter coordination in natural disasters is limited to the emergency phase and explicitly 'excludes transitional and permanent housing[25]' a partner is required to see the work through recovery.

That partner is usually UN-Habitat, with UNDP sometimes involved, especially if shelter is clearly identified as an issue of early recovery. There is no formal agreement between UN-Habitat and IFRC at a global level (which has its own implications, see later section) but there is an unofficial understanding. UN-Habitat is responsible for transitional and permanent housing within the UN system and the Federation feels that it is correct to hand shelter work to a dedicated specialist shelter agency. Habitat clearly feels it has the mandate to respond to this.

The Handover Process in Nepal

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[25] Memorandum of Understanding with UNOCHA.

In Nepal the handover process has already been discussed within Contingency Planning where all actors (UN-Habitat, NRCS, OCHA, the Govt DUDBC and implementing partners) where made aware of the general arrangement to handover to UN-Habitat after the emergency.

Discussions began as early as October to hand over the work of the cluster. If the Contingency Planning facilitated the handover however then the lack of a strong UN-Habitat presence in country hindered it somewhat, an oft encountered problem for the Federation. The RC/HC was also reportedly reluctant to agree the handover to UN-Habitat –aware of the general global relationship he was concerned by the agency's lack of capacity - and would have been happier if the Federation itself had continued leading, which was not possible.

To assist in the handover IFRC (as in Bangladesh after Cyclone Sidr) made a substantial contribution of $20,000 to fund a Habitat consultant (an international supported by two national officers) to manage the cluster in the recovery phase. The Head of Delegation was very keen to see Habitat take over, partly due to the ongoing discussions about the establishment of some kind of permanent capacity for shelter within Nepal. The handover was based on an MOU prepared by the trainer/coordinator, itself a variant on previous models used in Bangladesh etc.

Exact timing of the handover was planned for December, partly because the Federation had met its unofficial commitment of at least three months disaster response and also because the embankment repair was supposed to be completed by the middle of the month. This would then permit work on a recovery and return strategy for the bulk of the families where shelter would obviously be a key part. Unfortunately the repair did not occur until the end of January, the flood waters continued flowing, which naturally brought that return and recovery to a near standstill (undermined the already late general transition support of the UN and partners) and continued humanitarian need beyond that which was originally felt necessary.

Although both IFRC and UN-Habitat in-country are happy with the handover the field mission and interviews have highlighted a number of issues:

- *Understanding Roles and Responsibilities*: It was clear that although implementing partners that worked closely with the ESC understood the handover, those outside the shelter cluster itself were less clear. It was not clear what changes are made when IFRC leadership becomes Habitat leadership and it was not clear in particular whether UN-Habitat would keep doing all the work, especially covering humanitarian issues, or drop these for recovery needs. Several agencies felt that there was a lack of information generally on what the handover entailed.
- *Continuity*: It was felt that UN-Habitat did not 'pick up the slack' in its coordination role. There were fewer meetings, which was understood. However the Google-site stopped being updated at all. There are also concerns about Habitat's work in ongoing humanitarian need (see below.)
- *Humanitarian Needs Continuing*: Concerns remain in four areas:
  - Addressing Deteriorating Conditions. The quality of many camps is now not good with diminishing standards, partly the responsibility of the lifespan of temporary shelter materials. In one camp (the Junmka prison) there are only the original poor tarpaulins in place. The needs of the red zone families who will not

> "Did the Federation leave too early? No, because believed that the dam would be fixed in December. "
> ESC Implementing Partner

return will remain important for some time.

- o Camp Situation: The field mission certainly showed some residual need with some poorly located camps existing on sand flats, with poor quality shelter materials compounded by a harsh environment dominated by rising winds etc.
- o Camp Consolidation: The government fact-finding mission decided there would be a need to consolidate families from the red zone into very few large camps. This will entail some humanitarian concerns immediately (such as minimum standards) as well as probably continued relief provision.
- o Advocacy: There are strong rumours that local authorities were trying to get families to take the 50,000 Rs return package even when they had no land to return to i.e. the red zone families.

To date UN-Habitat in the initial period continued humanitarian activities, such as SSI tracking and monitoring, including taking responsibility for this during any camp movement or consolidation, in the new year of 2009 it moved much more into recovery programming, supporting the return of IDPs, the promotion of build back better structures etc[26]. The IFRC and NRCS should continue to assist with these endeavours working with UN-Habitat to ensure that residual humanitarian needs identified above are being addressed.

Activisation: Overview And Recommendations

The Koshi flooding is a perfect example of a disaster which fails to meet the criteria for a 'large' disaster and thus does not entail a full roll-out of the cluster system, a scenario seen quite often in the last six months. It has asked some clear questions: what is the IFRC's role in non-major natural disasters? What is the IFRC's role when there is no disaster at all? How does the global cluster interact with formalised cluster systems in-country? It is clear that such questions need careful analysis to avoid unequal commitments being made by the Federation at Geneva and Nepal levels.

Following the disaster it took nearly a month to get anyone on ground, and that has been identified by all internal IFRC stakeholders (as well as many involved in the humanitarian response) as something that should not be allowed to occur in future.

"In the first month Saptari was without shelter coordination" Implementing Partner
"no complaints about the [shelter] cluster except the late arrival." Cluster Lead
"I'd point out its [the shelter cluster's] late arrival to the field." Implementing Partner
"If there was a need and there was, why didn't they respond sooner?" UN Staff Member

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[26] *Resources for Shelter Recovery:* Donors were already by early 2009 reluctant to continue funding any humanitarian need, as reportedly they felt it was a situation that appeared to have no end, that there has been no transition policy and that a lot of money had already been given for shelter. Their conclusions appear somewhat valid but do not remove the issue of the 3,500 families of the Red Zone who cannot return because their land has basically been destroyed, and who will continue to require aid until their situation is resolved. Also in April it is reported that 2,000 families returned to their Red Zone land despite its condition; they will need support.
UN-Habitat meanwhile has made funding approaches to donors in country without success. There has been little support except from WFP (linked to vocational training for construction for returnees.) A project for low-cost durable shelter structures for vulnerable groups was included in the UNDP Early Recovery plan but remains unfunded. However the government fact-finding mission has indicated that government will fund recovery substantially, including land purchase and house construction.

This issue is not just an internal issue but includes the manner in which the cluster system was activated and what that meant for the Federation. There is clearly some work to do to balance the drive to move towards permanent clusters with what seem to be particular difficulties for the ESC and IFRC's leadership of it, and this work needs to be done, not just in Nepal. There needs to be a solid analysis of the complexities (perhaps even the 'incompatibility') between the Federation's role in being on the one hand, part of an international institution under the leadership of the RC/HC, and the ongoing work of building the capacity of National Societies

Even whilst these 'strategic' questions await discussion there is still room for a more streamlined ESC response based on a range of disaster situations. The lateness of the deployment was compounded by the almost immediate removal of the trainer/coordinator (as well as the Head of the Delegation). This had implications for the general activities of the cluster (in that they were partly delayed) and it is felt they particular damaged the ability of the ESC to work on the area of capacity building that was seen as so important to this deployment.

Staffing: Seniority of staff was not an issue but rather a) the role of all the staff b) their length of time in country c) the relationship of the whole team to the NRCS. The decision to recruit national staff through the NRCS was laudable but ultimately costly in terms of mission confusion and time lost whilst waiting for the staff to be hired.

This capacity building element, both internal through the training of a ESC coordinator, and working with the NRCS in coordination and information management, was hampered by a lack of a plan, reliant on people that may or may not be suitable as trainers, and were not properly tasked; there were simply too many variables.

Some members of the ESC team have wondered about the value of their deployments. It is difficult, however, to untangle this question from the belief that there were some aspects of the mission (specifically the capacity building and early continuity issues) that were not properly planned.

Logistics/Administration: The current system, where much is supplied by Geneva and IFRC/NRCS and where the team leader can apply items to budgets and make some local decisions, works well with an experienced team-leader. There may be a need to develop a more structured budget/logistics support for those less trained or confident. There does need to be some improvement in the issuing of contracts and provision of basic advances to staff so that they can concentrate on their emergency duties.

The National Society and the ESC: Capacity Building with the National Society during the disaster made the Federation's Head of Delegation task of balancing relations between the NRCS and the ESC (something that has been seen as generally successful) more difficult than perhaps it should have been during an emergency.

On the one hand the cluster and international staff felt the NRCS was not interested in the capacity building for coordination. One might argue that once the decision had finally been made that the NS would not coordinate, then they expected that coordination team deployed to report to them. That it did not fuelled their general attitude towards the capacity building.

On the other hand the NRCS pointed out that the training done by the shelter expert from Kuala Lumpur worked precisely because he was close to the NS. They say the willingness is there but they need to know what if anything, training means for the future. They see the advantages of the standards and application within the cluster work and think it can be applied by them. They see themselves as in a perfect position

between government and the rest of the humanitarian community, able to get compromises that others cannot, which in part appears true. However contrary this may be to some core aspects of the cluster system, there is a strong feeling from the National Society that if the global cluster is a real part of the Federation and if that Federation is made up of members such as themselves, then the ESC needs to be much more attached in disaster situations. If this feeling is replicated in other NS the Federation needs to recognise this as it continues ESC deployment and development, and design policy which guides the closeness or lack of closeness of National Societies to the ESC.

The Future: Formalised Shelter Capacity for Nepal: Correspondence internal between the IFRC and the meetings in Nepal and lead up to Koshi clearly show that this issue has not been fully thought through, although the federation appears of the few agencies to have started the discussion, partly of course because it has much more at stake given its separation from the UN. At core remains the question of balancing the global clusters 'international' nature with the Federation's role in building national capacity.

The seeming unwillingness of UNHCR participation within any of the emergency shelter developments is of some concern.

The Handover: This remains a challenge, not only due to the weakness of the chosen partner UN-Habitat but rather the way in which handovers are made and the questions they raise. Much of this depends on the decision of the IFRC to limit itself to the disaster phase. There are questions about how much the Federation should assist Habitat, in early staffing, in general funding, in centralised funding requests at Geneva level. When the Federation stops working as cluster coordinator the cut-off date does not eradicate humanitarian need and, and if for some reason UN-Habitat does not meet that need the Federation's image will be tarnished.

In this case the ESC unit felt the handover was good but perhaps rushed. There remain humanitarian needs that the Federation should continue to monitor and work on with UN-Habitat.

RECOMMENDATIONS: GLOBAL CLUSTER

1) *IFRC Deployment Policy:*

    a) Work with OCHA HRSU and other clusters to really examine what the formalisation of clusters means out of disasters. This needs clarity and understanding down to field level.

    b) The Federation has to develop policy about how to manage the drive to have permanent, formalised clusters in countries where it is expected to be ready to respond to disasters. This policy should include a balance of the following points:

    - When to deploy the cluster and when to relay on national capacity.
    - A deliberation on the role of the National Societies and their place in any formalised system.
    - Whether or not to (or how much to) challenge the drive to institutionalise clusters at a country level.

2) *Deployment Model Scenarios:* Consider building models of deployment for different scenarios, especially where capacity building/training is a core element. Redesign terms of reference for staff and missions appropriately. Modify ongoing training programmes where appropriate. Otherwise, maintain current excellent flexible approach.

3) *Capacity Building:*

   a) If capacity building is to be a major part of missions then work with ESC coordinators and Heads of Delegations to ensure enough time and effort is set aside to do this work. If necessary slow down implementation.

   b) Develop a detailed capacity-building component ESC roll-out:

      - Indicate what is expected of staff doing the training and what the goals are, as well as, not forgetting, the necessary resources needed to do the work and reach those goals.
      - Make this component of the ESC flexible enough to be adapted to different contexts.
      - Add it to future training sessions.
      - Seek out additional expert training staff where needed.

4) *Strengthen Roles and Responsibilities:*

   a) Terms of Reference Strength and Clarity: Ensure all internal partners are completely aware of the roles and responsibilities of the ESC and how they interplay with the IFRC and the National Societies.

   b) All IFRC Head of Delegations should be clearly aware of their responsibility for carrying out the IFRC obligations in humanitarian reform, and if possible all should be trained, not just in Emergency Shelter but in all aspects of the reform process. Following on from this, if the Head of Delegation is supposedly responsible for this, then it should be written into their TOR.

   c) Work with regional IFRC offices to conduct a more thorough training of key IFRC and NS staff in disaster prone countries.

5) *Staffing/Logistics/Administration*:

   a) Staff continuity is essential – sacrifice things elsewhere.

   b) Consider constructing a more solid administrative structure to support ESC units, especially for less experienced coordinators.

   c) Ensure contracts are issued before staff members are deployed.

   d) Streamline administration issues in both human resources and financing. Consider providing authority to senior coordinators of ESC or Heads of Delegation.

   e) Internal handovers to be thorough regardless of circumstances. Formalise handover procedures through the provision of guidelines.

6) *Handover*:

   a) Maintain a flexible approach to handovers, especially on timing, with no artificial cut-offs of support.

   b) Consider a more robust support for UN-Habitat funding, given how the lack of a strong handover has an impact on IFRC reputation. Balance this with a demand that UN-Habitat follow through on the commitments made.

RECOMMENDATIONS: IFRC NEPAL

1) *Lessons Learnt*: There is a strong need to look internally at how the cluster functioned vis-à-vis the internal actors. Include the examination of questions that relate to the role of the IFRC and NRCS in a formalised cluster system. It may be useful to open this out to a few key partners.

2) *Formalised Clusters*: Work with OCHA and through the IASC and in detail to understand what these formalised clusters actually mean for humanitarian response in country and the impact on Federation work and mandate. Of particular note is how to develop the work of the National Society within the cluster, what level of coordination, balances between coordination and implementation etc. Work with Geneva on an appropriate response.

3) *UNHCR*: Seek the assistance of the RC/HC in ensuring that UNHCR are part of the shelter discussions and ongoing developments in Nepal.

4) *National Society: W*ork on developing appropriate decision-making systems in country to cover should individual staff not be in place.

5) *Residual Humanitarian Need:* Continue to work with UN-Habitat on any residual humanitarian issues and provide appropriate support where possible.

ACTIVITIES OF THE SHELTER CLUSTER

Introduction: Contextual Challenges Overview

With the actual activities of the cluster unit's coordination, the external challenges to respond to Koshi (the weakness of the government's DM capacity, imbalances within the cluster activisation) meet the internal challenges (the lateness of arrival and the relations with the NRCS.) Given this context how did the cluster manage the 'core' part of its work?

Strategy

Strategic Framework

A strategic framework was finalised for the mission in the first week of the trainer/coordinator's deployment in liaison with the Geneva Federation Shelter Department; it identifies key goals and objectives and a response strategy, the latter including detailed notes on operational and management priorities, and also provides us with a means of gauging the success of the cluster deployment by its activities. It has few differences from the norm except winterisation which was seen to be a likely issue for shelter in Nepal. Beyond that it specifies exactly the twelve items Shelter Sector Item (SSI)/None-Food Item (NFI) selected by the partners to be tracked by the cluster as part of its mission.

Whilst the cluster implementing partners felt the framework was understood and followed the ESC team itself felt that it was not always responded to, or followed; there was both a lack of commitment and/or capacity. The main issue was the lack of implementing partners followed by in part a lack of senior staff within those implementing partners, see page 52 for details.

In-Country Emergency Shelter Contingency Plan

The Nepal Emergency Shelter Contingency Plan prepared by IFRC and partners identifies core areas of work for the various partners as well as the key objectives. It also indicates the then current gaps and constraints on development.

In actuality in response to Koshi it was hardly used at all. In fact it was clear even from the first meeting between the Head of Delegation, DUDBC and the ESC trainer/coordinator that the Contingency Plan was already largely irrelevant.

The Contingency Planning review work-shop in 2009 found that part of the problem was that the plan was too vague, based on flooding Nepal-wide, (lacking in specific details of those areas flooded locations). It was agreed the plan was not much use as originally intended but, as DUDBC stated, as "a useful exercise but lacking in detail, field work demands much more detail, norms, contexts, detail so people are really able to response fast.[27]"

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[27] It is encouraging that the department (through the recent workshop to revise the Contingency Planning) has internalised flaws in the previous plan, some of which pertain to itself, including that the plan had no element of support for people to build their own shelter, not enough equipment was indicated and there was no training specified; the plan presumed many families could build on their own.

Shelter Items/Non-Food Items

At global level there is no agreement on exactly what items should be managed and tracked by the ESC – this is not mentioned in the MOU between IFRC and OCHA for the Federation's work on emergency shelter in disaster situations. The subject has been discussed periodically since 2005, the overlaps usually being WASH items and occasionally with health (e.g. mosquito nets, buckets, jerry cans). Over time however an unwritten rule has developed that this issue can and should be worked out at country level.

In the case of Nepal the ESC brought stakeholders to resolve this question and they chose twelve: bamboo frames, heavy-duty plastic sheets, light plastic sheets, blankets, cooking stoves, kitchen sets, lights, mosquito nets, raised beds, sleeping mats, solid fuel, toolkits, winter clothes.

There were no reports of any problems with this decision in the response to Koshi.

Management and Coordination

Cluster Coordination

Coordination was done at both capital and local levels. District level meetings took place weekly (in the Sunsari Government Office and in Saptari in the Rajbiraj NRCS). They were usually chaired by the trainer/coordinator or in some cases the information manager. Shelter cluster coordination was also sometimes undertaken as part of the General Coordination Meeting co-chaired by OCHA and government (since the work of CCM and the ESC were particularly central to the overall response.

At Kathmandu level meetings were less frequent, partly due to the paucity of implementing partners, and when meetings did occur, key partners such WASH and Health clusters, did not attend. In fact the general perception of the ESC team was that both these clusters were unresponsive to calls to work closer (although WASH did improve over time, but not until late November when a dedicated external cluster consultant arrived.) An example cited was the repeated request of the Health cluster to undertake a review of health at the Jumka prison camp, which the ESC, CCCM and other actors felt was jeopardy grave concern given the government lack of commitment to standards there and the presence of families' animals. The analysis was never made. The ESC felt that the lack of participation in cross-cluster work undermined the work of the cluster system as a whole; it further suggests that some clusters often worked within their own 'silo' and outside only with reluctance.

There was no Strategic Advisory Group set up as there was felt there was no need for a further layer of actors given the relative mid-level disaster and subsequent fewer coordination issues to address.

Direct and regular meetings with CCM both locally and at Kathmandu levels were very fruitful to both IOM and the IFRC team, natural given their closely connected role in camp management and provision of shelter (although there was reportedly some confusion at times in which roles were specifically CCCM and which were for ESC.) They worked closely on a range of issues from day to day needs, to minimum standard advocacy and location of future camps.

Government

The DUDBC clearly understands that they are responsible for shelter in emergency situations and they were good participants in the contingency planning[28], a process that actually lead to them being formally recognised by government as taking the lead in this sector. They are now seeking internal funding for its work, because they admit the department does not have the necessary leadership, coordination capacity. Centrally they appear to understand both the Emergency Shelter Cluster (and its activities) well, and from discussions appear to understand the cluster system better than most other government departments. Their capacity to work during disasters, however, remains poor.

It became quite clear that the ESC was simply too fast and too complicated for the DUDBC, which has minimal capacity for coordination, especially at the local level where it really mattered; whilst working on the Contingency Plan had empowered government, the disaster had disempowered them. They were unable to respond to the needs of the ESC. It should be noted that this in itself is not a criticism of the ESC but rather a reiteration of the challenges of building national capacities and managing the needs of a disaster.

Problems for government support to the ESC in Nepal include:

- *Understanding*. Not all local government officers were not really aware, at least at first, of exactly the role of the ESC. At one point it was reported that local development officers asked the trainer/coordinator "where are the houses?" The DUDBC were in part confused whether the ESC was involved in only coordination or implementation, especially given the work of IFRC/NRCS in implementation.
- *Capacity Centrally*: The ESC did not work closely with the DUDBC, partly due to the lack of capacity of the department at national and local levels. The DUDBC has the mandate for emergency shelter but has little funding and not enough staffing for emergency shelter.
- *Capacity Locally*: At district level where the hard work of camp creation, formalisation, provision of services etc are actually worked through the DUDBC has even less capacity; its single regional representatives cover a number of districts – for example Sunsari was actually one district of 4 managed by a DUDBC representative out of Biratnagar whilst Saptari was covered by another officer who also worked in three districts further West. These regional officers have very little communication with their neighbouring staff members. Several stakeholders mentioned that the lack of a government representative locally left the ESC without adequate representation.
- *Knowledge of the Sector*: though improving government knowledge of emergency shelter is still poor, especially at local levels. Here, whilst there is an understanding of building codes and land surveying there is little awareness of what are the needs of families for housing in a crisis situation.
- *Rubber-Stamp*: Government officials did not question the cluster's decisions enough. It was reported they said yes almost all the time without thought. (This does not obviously apply to questions of minimum standards for family space however, see page 58.)

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[28] In fact the DUDBC were only formally recognised by The Ministry of Home Affairs as the focal point for emergency shelter after the Ministry had been presented with the completed Contingency Plan, which highlighted the lack of government mandated counterpart.

Standardisation of Response[29]

The quality of shelter items varied widely throughout the mission especially in the days before the ESC team arrived. In fact the poor quality of shelters was of some concern in the first weeks with several organisations distributing whatever they had in stock to the displaced (such as a plastic sheet over a simple frame).

On the arrival of the ESC team it was noted that basic standards improved (including the redistribution of sub-standard shelters as above) but that did not prevent there being problems with the lack of standardisation of shelter packages, the imbalances in quantity/types of kits, and the quality of some of those distributed. The inter-agency monitoring undertaken by UN Habitat in January 2009 states that 52.5% of those IDP (Internally Displaced Person) families interviewed indicated of the items distributed were insufficient to meet their immediate household emergency needs. The inter-agency monitoring undertaken by UN-Habitat in January 2009 clearly indicate the inconsistency in the numbers of some items provided; for example for kitchen sets one implementing agency Marwadi Sewa Samiti provided 8 pieces, whilst Save the Children provided 15 pieces and NRCS provided 14 pieces. Government officials felt that almost all the shelter structures meanwhile were not of good enough quality, needing to be more robust, more resistant to rain and heat. Rotary tents and kitchen kits were often quoted as the best quality.

Tensions were apparently evident due to this lack of uniformity in quantity and quality of aid items given, an issue of concern to several government officials who cited it as a problem between communities and even between different families living in the same camp

Implementing Agencies

One challenge of the ESC that was evident was the relative lack of committed implementing partners involved in the cluster. This mirrored the general picture where the scale of Koshi appeared to have limited disaster response to only those agencies that were operational in country, and not all of those got involved either because of the lack of interest or because they did not have some pre-existing capacity.

The trainer/coordinator advocated for greater involvement with both implementing partners and their possible donors. He encouraged the partners to put in for CAP funding and generally urged greater involvement. The ESC team also felt that not all of them were particularly motivated by the sense of emergency.

The response to requests to give Koshi extra importance was mixed. No organisation within the cluster brought in extra international staff to assist with the work. Also very few implementing partners felt it necessary to seek additional funding. Apart from the IFRC who launched an appeal for an additional $1.2 million and the $900K sought by Oxfam, Save the Children US and IOM in the supplementary CAP prepared by OCHA. Habitat for Humanity appealed for US $2.5 million and UN-Habitat for US$1.5 million for shelter in the Floods supplement – both received little funding against this appeal.

The ESC felt that the work of implementing partners was of mixed quality but generally good and if there was a particular area of concern it was that not all supplied information quickly or in an appropriate standard. In the early work of shelter, including before the ESC team arrived, NRCS and Oxfam were key actors, with NRCS in particular continuing a strong role throughout the shelter response. Caritas and Care were also indicated of

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[29] This has also been identified as one of the main issues during the recent Contingency Planning Workshop.

working well with the cluster whilst Habitat for Humanity signalled out for their work in particular, especially on technical issues.

The agencies themselves reported that they were happy with the work of the ESC in distribution tracking, standard maintenance etc and several said that the coordination work was of paramount importance regardless of the scale of the disaster itself. The difficulty of partners attending shelter meetings along with all the other cluster forums was also mentioned, which is not unusual in these crises situations and something to be considered. Noted was the general goodwill on all sides.

Information and Communications

Information Management

ESC Information Management for Koshi was delayed and made problematic by early staffing issues that prevented the concentration of the Information Management on his core TOR activities. A flexible approach was used which included:

- A Google-groups website (based on the Cyclone Sidr model) designed to provide simple access to all cluster documentation.
- Regular shelter tracking and monitoring updates (built upon a commodity tracking database already constructed by OCHA.)
- Meetings agendas and minutes.
- Visual aids for shelter needs.
- Tracking support offered for all items distributed, even those outside of the formally agreed twelve.

The work of shelter Information Management (IM) was made challenging firstly due to the poor quality and quantity of baseline data (census data was several years old and apparently unreliable) compounded by the difficulty in gauging how many people had been actually affected (made difficult by the challenge of access in the first weeks to areas of victims and the generally mobile nature of population. Early information on numbers was particularly sporadic and highly variable. There was, for example, no information on supposedly 20,000 displaced in Saptari for one week after the disaster. The government was also reluctant to report Indian refugees and victims living with host families.

By the time the ESC coordination team had arrived the population was much more settled in camps and access (though made problematic by the still-flowing flood-river) had at least been resumed to both sides. Continual movement of beneficiaries plus lax registration/verification by authorities did continue to cause problems however during the whole mission. This meant the ESC had to gauge as best as possible beneficiary numbers to fill in gaps in information; these were accepted by all partners in the cluster.

With regard to the information provided by the ESC, access to it and interest in it were issues. The latter was difficult to affect given the mixed quality of implementing partners and other clusters. The ESC managed the poor access to the internet at the field level by printing all documentation for all partners.

The ESC relied on IOM in its role as CCCM lead for a lot of the information of movements of families (as did many other clusters) as well as on national staff of various agencies.. IOM's displacement tracking matrix was invaluable. For IM the ESC Information Manager worked closely with the only dedicated IM staff in-country, OCHA and later with CCCM when they posted dedicated IM staff in early October.

Several implementing partners as well as OCHA felt that the ESC was proactive and comprehensive in its collection and distribution of information.

Communications/Visibility

Information on the work of the ESC was passed to partners in document form (the strategic framework as well the regular tracking updates, minutes of meetings, agendas etc) and through the regular meetings at field and capital levels. The ESC was well known and identified by many to be strong at both central and local levels – especially through the trainer/coordinator and the information manager. Some areas of concern did appear however:

- *Inner Circle*: Beyond the immediate shelter cluster members there much less understood about what the ESC's role was in shelter. The cluster's TOR was not well known.
- *Relationships Unclear*: The intricacies' of the both the relationship of the ESC within the cluster system as well as its relationship to the Nepal IFRC delegation and NRCS were not particularly well known, and confusing to many.
- *Beneficiaries*: There was no information passed to beneficiaries directly by the ESC team. It relied on implementing partners to pass on information, including what provision families would receive. There are concerns that beneficiaries only know of NRCS locally and also complaints of information 'gatekeepers' restricting information at both government/community levels. The ESC team felt others should be responsible for controlling rumours, which were substantial, and often politically motivated.
- *Processes*: They were not always well explained. For example, the handover, when the trainer/coordinator left and UN-Habitat took over there was a lack of communication on exactly what this meant. Some people felt that it meant nothing, that there was no change in the system, or the work, but just the person.

Part of the problem is that there are no printed materials existing to communicate to various stake-holders about the work of the ESC. A toolkit exists for the ESC team itself. A booklet exists but this is for an "audience educated in humanitarian reform." The Geneva IFRC Shelter Department state this issue is currently being partly addressed, through both printed form and video.

Assessment of Need

The ESC did not conduct its own assessments of shelter; it was felt that its internal resources were not adequate for a separate assessment and also questioned the need. Instead it relied on others to undertake the assessments, especially those conducted by IOM and the CCCM. The ESC did assist government several times during its assessments (by providing technical advice) but this was also problematic given authorities' lack of consultation. On one occasion the trainer/coordinator received a call in Kathmandu for assistance the government needed to do an assessment the next day in Sunsari and Saptari.

It was felt by the ESC team that there was no need for a separate shelter assessment. The evaluation has found no evidence to challenge that.

Challenges and Advocacy Issues

Naturally during a response to natural disaster in the context of Koshi there are many inter-related issues that are part of the work of the ESC, some internal, some external, some about which the ESC has the ability (and obligation) to make advocacy and others which are beyond its influence.

It should be noted that as in other disasters even those areas that are within its direct advocacy responsibility the ESC worked in tandem with other actors, especially CCM given that most of the shelter provision was within camps organised by the IOM managed cluster, as well as with OCHA, as guardian of overall aspects of humanitarian response.

Cross-Cutting Issues

As mentioned earlier there is little evidence of cross-cutting issues being addressed by inter-agency meetings, either those of the IASC or cluster lead meetings. In the supplementary CAP released by OCHA in late September there is only minimal mention of gender and HiV/Aids (both within the health cluster) and environment as well as age are not mentioned at all.

The ESC in its part tried to address this lack of cross-cutting work through pushing for more cluster lead meetings where these issues could be addressed between clusters but there was little follow-through on this from OCHA or the other clusters.

Winterisation

An added element of the strategic framework for Koshi response was the imminent need to 'winterise' the response. The ESC took the lead on this, advocating as early as the first week of October for increased SSI support: mattresses, wind-proofing, stoves and fuel, insulation of both roofs and floor. CCCM played a role in this advocacy and it was supported by OCHA, who were happy that technical experts could introduce this issue.

Full winterisation was never an option explored by cluster agencies. Recommendations were made backed with technical support and guidance on typical weather conditions. Agencies agreed to 'winterise' to a certain level, with extra blankets, clothes, raised beds. An examination reveals that whilst there was some extra distributions made by agencies there was in general a lack of commitment (and extra funding) from partners to meet the gaps. The ESC feels it did as much as was possible given the paucity of interest from implementation partners.

Forced Removal of Displaced from Schools

Several months after the disaster there was a big push by government (supported by UNICEF) to move the IDPs from camps organised in schools. The ESC, CCM and OCHA advocated against this decision, given that the new locations chosen were not particularly good, were not enough to meet standards such as sphere, and had not been properly prepared. Secondly there were concerns about the government's ability to manage large IDP movements, which were partly born out during some moves such as when the government

requested NRCS to provide relief items to 100 families that were being moved only for 300 families to arrive at the new camp site.

At first the RC/HC was in agreement of the UNICEF supported venture but successful advocacy within the IASC obtained his support for a delay in the implementation of these moves until adequate places could be found for those being relocated.

Host Families

Some families made homeless by the flooding were helped generously by others who hosted them and shared their own often minimal resources. This added strain on host communities and families was clearly identified as an issue and problem to address (especially considering how hosting takes strain off camp resources and management as well as provides IDPs with a more normal living environment). There were calls by OCHA, joined by ESC and others to ensure that families living with hosts were properly registered, verified and received aid.

The government was reportedly "not at all interested in host family support of the displaced" according to one organisation. The NRCS was also a supporter of the government position. WFP asked to give food to the host families as well as those they hosted but government did not agree. This in part lead to further problems with camps becoming a pull factor, putting greater strain on their resources, with substantial numbers of families remaining with host families and keeping an empty tent in camps in order to remain registered and receive aid.

Calls by WFP and others for this to be addressed higher up within government made some progress as distribution of food in particular was expanded into return areas but beyond this there was little success in this area.

Indian Refugees

At one point thousands of Indian refugees arrived in Sunsari and Saptari districts of Nepal, mostly because these areas have points of higher ground not found in the devastated part of Bihar.

Humanitarian organisations, lead by OCHA and including the ESC team, reminded the Nepalese authorities of their duty of care to the Indian families displaced The Nepalese authorities were generally reluctant to respond to this advocacy, claiming that the Indian families would be double-registered. Unfortunately such claims remained impossible to verify as there was very little communications across the border by any actor, government or otherwise. The ESC team reported it did attempt to use both the IFRC and WFP to discuss issues cross-border but these failed.

After more than a month, after continual and repeated urging from the humanitarian community, Indian families did receive at least some assistance. In early 2009 those that had not already returned spontaneously, returned to Bihar on buses provided by Indian authorities.

Registration and Verification

Government registration and verification was poor throughout relief operations which made those operations difficult, and it was further complicated by the transient nature of the population (both in general and during the post-disaster period) and as a result of some poor policy decisions by government early-on in the crisis. There were frequent under and over-counting and allegations of beneficiary lists polluted by non-victims.

The NRCS Sunsari suggested that even at the height of the disaster up to 50% of some camp shelters were actually empty. People were living with host families or back on their land. This had knock-on effects of making relief difficult to gauge, distributions sometimes chaotic, with some relief items certainly going astray.

Politics And Politicisation of Aid

There were frequent bandhs in both Sunsari and Saptari, many of them lead by the Koshi Victims Struggle Committee[30] who stopped movement of vehicles, prevented aid from reaching people and blocked repair of the embankment. At one point Sunsari affected areas were closed down by protests for twenty days, with protests about the government plans for return, which were felt to be insufficient.

Saptari in particular (with its many armed groups) remained a difficult place to work for both government and humanitarian organisations with security of staff, programmes and the aid itself always a concern. The government and NRCS were seen as weaker there which, given their inter-connected history of relief management, had implications for the speed and efficacy of the Koshi response.

There was also a perception that the alleged registration of non-victims (mentioned above) was in part an outcome of local leaders urging these people to register and receive aid that was not designed for them, to "get their share."

Protection Issues

A protection cluster operated at central and district levels. Protection representatives made the usual comments as to what they felt was important in the provision of emergency shelter: that there be no discrimination in distributions, that gender issues such as women's privacy be maintained, that there is a general feeling of security in emergency shelters/camps and that community participation be central to all decisions.

Whilst there was some concern of increased sexual-gender based violence and there was allegations of occasional excessive from the APF and other authorities, there were few incidents to report (especially in Sunsari); respondents both inside and outside the cluster felt that there were no major protection problems.

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[30] Note that the KVSC was formed on 11 September, submitting a list of demands to the Sunsari District Administration Office. Not to be confused with KVS, Koshi Victims Society, a local NGO and Oxfam partner, working out of Saptari District for more than seven years, addressing historical issues when embankment construction in 1954 (as part of the 1950 India/Nepal Friendship Treat) and are still claiming compensation for that construction on and around their land. Various anecdotal accounts suggest different opinions of IDPs on the activities of KVSC, with some suggesting they had wide support and others that they were forced to support.

Festival Disruptions

Holiday periods for festivals are important and lengthy occasions in Nepal. It was unfortunate that during the disaster response there were two major festivals in October: Dishain (6th-13th) and Tihar (27th-30th). Both of these seriously disrupted relief efforts at Kathmandu and field levels, as staff in many cases stopped working, drivers of relief supplies went home and government offices were closed.

Land for Camps and Minimum Standards

Standards of Shelter Provision

For the Koshi response the effective maintenance of proper standards was clearly wrapped up in the lack of available land for the displaced. The strategic framework clearly states that sphere is a guiding principle to minimum standards but the lack of land challenged this from the beginning, a large problem for all concerned, government and aid organisations alike, and even remains an issue now in the recovery and return phase with 3,500 families without land to return to.

During the emergency all available high land was quickly used for shelters and although some families did host IDPs there are also reports of a lack of community spirit, especially in Saptari, and little willingness by those unaffected to help others in need by providing them land[31]. Secondly some land that was found was clearly not suitable, such as the Nauerchowk camp, which is basically situated on a desertified piece of former flooded land, and is now something of a half-abandoned dust-bow. Land along the river beyond the embankment used for more permanent facilities when camps became more formalised and organised, is prone to flooding and will not be sustainable in the future. Thirdly, displaced families request that they wanted to remain near to their land and the east-west highway added to pressure on land use.

CCCM, ESC and OCHA were strong advocates for the maintenance of strong standards but government, though admitting the issue was important, stated that they had minimal scope to meet standards. Advocacy was also undermined by other clusters. CCCM, for example, felt that the WASH cluster went ahead and 'backed' a poor government decision that breached *Sphere* (by constructing facilities in poor camp locations designed for too many people) and they did this without consultation with other stakeholders.

At one point the government wanted close to a 1000 families to go into a space which under *Sphere* would cater for only for only 125. After the ESC advocated strongly for *Sphere*, the issue was taken to the Deputy Prime-Minister who called the NRCS Disaster Management Director for guidance. After strong advocacy from the Red Cross the number of shelters was reduced to 250.

ESC Activities: Overview and Recommendations

Taking into consideration the late arrival of the Cluster team members in general the mission met the needs of the global cluster, its Terms of Reference in deployment, followed the strategic framework and

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[31] However it has been suggested by others that there was community spirit it just went largely unreported, especially during the initial phase when there was a very robust response with local funds.

contributed to a much better situation for beneficiaries than when they first arrived. Overall the activities of the cluster team were excellent. Some of the comments about the team included:

> *"The magnitude of the problem meant that authorities were pleased with the work of the cluster."* Implementing Partner
> *"The ESC was good for information management and task making; it made shelter work much better. Its analysis and gap-filling were great."* Implementing Partner
> *"The Emergency Shelter Cluster were seen as absolutely in change and capable."* UN staff member
> *"The cluster lead strongly and their recommendations were also strong."* Government
> *"The cluster was good but it was difficult to cope with expectations."* Government

A few comments with a negative:

> *"The local government officers were afraid of the cluster team. They were always telling them they were wrong somehow."* UN national staff member
> *"They really didn't understand the pressure we were under. We had other issues, especially politics, to consider. Standards had to come later."* Government.
> *"The technical work of the cluster could have been better, advice on shelter techniques, training etc., we felt there was a lack of leadership on tech issues."* Implementing Partner
> *"There was always a gap between expectation and delivery."* Government.

In general all the partners of the cluster and those more generally involved in the disaster response were pleased with the work of the Emergency Shelter Cluster. OCHA, which was "greatly worried about shelter before the [cluster] team arrived" considered it one of the better managed clusters. It was felt that having dynamism within coordination was essential for the work and its success.

RECOMMENDATIONS: GLOBAL CLUSTER

1) *Balance Between Deployment Needs:* Carefully review missions and what is to be done. If capacity building is a priority, either of IFRC, NS or government, then give it the space to do so. Do not move so quickly.

2) *NFI/SSI Standardisation*:

   a) Work to streamline NFI and SSI packages (including their quality) with cluster partners on a global level.

   b) Consider formalising the NFI part of shelter emergency given its recognised work on this. Work with OCHA and cluster leads at global level and seek additional donor funding if appropriate.

3) *Information Campaign*: Develop a comprehensive dedicated public information campaign (aimed not only at partners but also at beneficiaries) as part of global deployments. Examine the work of the *Listening Project* (amongst other things) and prepare easily-adaptable tools for coordination teams in advance of their deployment.

RECOMMENDATIONS: IFRC NEPAL:

1) *Standards*: Address standardisation of NFI and SSI packages through both the IASC and continued contingency planning processes.

2) *Government Capacity Building*:

   a) Need to deepen work with DUDBC on their knowledge of the ESC and cluster system, especially at local levels.

   b) Work with them on response models that isolate and highlight their weak capacity to respond from central to local levels. This will highlight issues to meet in the interim and could allow DUDBC advocate for more resources to meet its responsibilities.

   c) Improve the work on technical standards within Contingency Planning.

ANNEXES

1) Timeline of Koshi Disaster.

2) List of those interviewed.

3) ESC TOR Koshi Nepal

Timeline of Koshi Disaster			
Date	**Event**	**Koshi General Coordination**	**Emergency Shelter Cluster**
August 18th	Koshi river bursts through embankment and effectively changed course. Initial reports vary between 45K and 70K people needing humanitarian assistance.		
August 18th	Regional Disaster Relief Committee Meeting – Biratnagar (OCHA reportedly the only international actor present.)		
August 19th		First OCHA representative visited the field. First GCM meeting held (and repeated daily for the next month.)	
August 21st	NTC phone service restored but with intermittent quality.		Head of Delegation informs RC/HC that scale of Koshi means no need for cluster activisation
August 23rd		OCHA decides the disaster is large enough to push for full UN and cluster resources.	Government requests NRCS set up Emergency Shelter Coordination.
August 24th		OCHA reports clusters set up for Koshi	At this time no organisation took up the management of the emergency shelter cluster.
August 26th		HRSU advisor arrives, adds weight to formalisation of clusters.	
August 29th		RC/HC letter to donors requesting $10 million of aid for Koshi.	
September			
2nd September	26,000 reported to be in permanent camps	IFRC launches appeal for $1.32 million for shelter kits	.
4th September	State of Emergency Declared in affected region.	Flood appeal states 61 shelter sites formalised with just over 50,000 registered, 3 thousand of them Indian. UNDAC team arrives from Geneva	
8th September			Head of Delegation writes to NS to confirm cluster activisation.
9th September		IASC Country-Team formalised cluster approach for Koshi response	
12th September	25 collective centres with an estimated 70% of the total amount of displaced		ESC Trainer/Coordinator Arrives

	people.	
13th September		ESC Information Manager Arrives
19th September	Flash floods temporarily displace 200,000 people in Western Nepal.	
22nd September		Trainer/Coordinator and HoD IFRC leave for Geneva shelter workshop
23RD September		Coordinator/Trainee Arrives
25th September		OCHA release flood supplementary CAP	
October		
2ND October		IFRC
8th October		First ESC SitRep produced
15th October		IM Officer Saptari hired
16th October		IM Officer Sunsari hired.
21st October		Coordinator/Trainee Leaves Mission
November		
7TH November		HoD Nepal informs RC of handover need and suggests Habitat.
23rd November		Consultant hired for Habitat by IFRC to manage the handover process.
December		
8th December		Gap Analysis of Shelter
12th December		ESC Coordinator leaves
15th December		Information Officer Saptari transferred to Habitat as part of handover.
16th December		Information Officer Sunsari hired by NRCS to work on reporting.
26th January	Koshi embankment repaired.	
13TH March		Reportedly 3,500 families still in camps – from Red Zone.	

Nepal ESC Evaluation Interview List

Name	Organisation	Title
HQ & Regional		
Graham Saunders	IFRC - Geneva	Head of Shelter department
Miguel Urquia	IFRC - Geneva	Senior Officer shelter department
Felix de Vries	IFRC - DMU APZ	Reg S delegate for Asia Pac
Mariko Sato	UN Habitat	Early Recovery Advisor
Emergency Shelter Deployed Staff		
Gregg Mcdonald	consultant for IFRC	ESC trainer/coordinator
Anno Muller	seconded from Neth RC	Information Manager
Fidel Pena	consultant for IFRC	ESC Coordinator
Anil	ESC hired	Information Officer Saptari
Tara Devi Garung	ESC hired	Information Officer Sunsari
Nepal IFRC & NRCS		
Andrea Reisinger	IFRC - Kathmandu	Head of country Delegation
Dev Ratna Dhakhwa	NRCS Kathmandu	Secretary General
Umesh Dhakal	NRCS Kathmandu	executive director
Tom Prasad Acharya	NRCS - Sunsari district	Pres NRCS Sunsari district
Dagan Sharma	NRCS - Sunsari district	Vice President
Bhisma Kafle	NRCS - Sunsari district	Secretary
Bal Kam Dahal	NRCS - Sunsari district	Relief Officer
Government Contacts		
Pratak Pathak	Prime's Minister's Officer	Senior Advisor
Thir Bahadur GC	Ministry of Home Affairs	Under Secretary
Mr. Indra B Shrestha	Dept for Urban Dev & Building	Director General
Dibeyeswar Prasad Sretha	Dept for Urban Dev & Building	Senior Economist
Guru Subedi	Local District Officer	
Durga Prasad Bhandari	Central District Officer	
Pradeep Singh	Deept for Urban Dev & Building	Regional Officer
William Patterson	USAID	
UN & Cluster		
Mr. Prafulla Pradhan	UN Habitat Kathmandu	Program coordinator Nepal
Mr. Gerard Ferrie	UN Habitat Kathmandu	***Shelter Cluster coordinator
Kimberley Deni	WFP Nepal	***Programme Officer
Larry Robertson	UNICEF Nepal	Chief, CWE Section
Lesley	UNICEF Nepal	***Wash Cluster Coordinator
Chris Hoffman	IOM	***Construction/Logistics Officer
Marc Gschwend	UN RCO	***Early Recovery Advisor
Wency Cue	UNOCHA Kathmandu	Head of office

Vincent Omuga	UNOCHA	?????
Karen Brewster	UNOCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Leith Baker	UNOCHA	Humanitrian Affairs Officer
Qadav KC	UN OCHA/UNICEF	Ass representative Sunsari
Kendra Clegg	UN OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs - Biratnagar
Antony Cardon	OHCHR	***Special Assistant to the High Comm
Lukas Heinzer	OHCHR	Humanitarian Liaison Officer
Ghulam Sherani	UNDP	Disaster Risk Management Officer
Andre Paquet	ICRC	Deputy Head of Office
Aziz Syed	ICRC	Co-Op Delegate
Milindi Illangasinghe	IOM	Camp Coordinator

*** denotes this person to also be a cluster coordinator

Implementing Organisations		
Aruna Paul Simittrarachchi	Habitat For Humanity	Reg Prog Advisor/Country Rep
Gopal Dahal	LWF Nepal	Programme Officer
Bines Roy	Oxfam	Field Officer
Rita Dhakal	Care-Nepal	Programme Officer
Rajan Ghimire	Caritas Nepal	Programme Officer
Bishnu Kharel	Oxfam Kathmandu	Disaster Management Officer
Mr. Wayne Gum	Oxfam Kathmandu	Country Director

Shelter Coordination Team: Nepal Floods Response: Terms Of Reference

Background

More than 54,000 people living in the eastern belt of the Saptakoshi River have been displaced as the river changed its course through densely populated human settlements and damaging the embankment on 19 August 2008. The flood has hit Sunsari district where there are reports of eight village development committees (Kusaha, Laukahi, Ghuski, Sreepur, Haripur, Narshimha, Madhuban and Basantapur) being badly affected and some others are in danger as the river is still continuing to flow through the damaged embankment. The impact may expand to Morang district.

Over 30.000 displaced persons have sought shelter in transit camps such as schools, campuses and public buildings in Sunsari and Saptari districts. Others have taken shelter with relatives. Around 20,000 people are still squatting in open air in the Saptari district. According to government sources, around 10,000 individuals have been displaced from adjoining areas in India and are taking shelter in Saptari district of Nepal.

The search, rescue, first aid and evacuation operation is under way by the Nepal Army, the police and the NRCS volunteers. On August 21st, the body of a woman was recovered in the Paschim Kusaha Village Development Committee. According to local media, more than 22 dead bodies are reported to be found in the vicinity of the Indian bordering villages. A situation assessment including Damage Assessment and Needs Assessment (DANA) is ongoing at the district level.

The NRCS as a part of the central disaster relief as well as district disaster relief committee is involved in coordination at all levels, in order to ensure effective response. The NRCS - along with UNOCHA, UNICEF, SCF (US), OXFAM, CARITAS, World Vision and many other humanitarian organizations and CBOs - has been cooperating with the Government. The Federation office in Nepal has been supporting the NRCS with international representation and policy decision making. The Federation representative is in continuous dialogue with the UN humanitarian coordinator. Additionally, the Federation representative in Nepal is ensuring the overall coordination of the Federation support and the support of the PNSs (Finnish, Danish and Belgian RC).

The NRCS, as one of the main shelter actors, has been requested to support the Home Ministry in coordinating the shelter response.

Objective

The key objective of the Shelter Coordination Team will be to contribute towards the effective provision of emergency shelter assistance to the affected population through the timely and efficient coordination of shelter actors in support of the national authorities.

This will prioritise:

- The rapid provision of basic shelter relief assistance to affected households on a large scale.
- Ensuring consistency in the type of shelter assistance across different agencies where possible and as appropriate.

Scope of services

Specifically, the Shelter Coordination Team will be responsible for facilitating and guiding the shelter actors to do the following:

Identification of key partners
- Identify key humanitarian partners for emergency shelter response, respecting their respective mandates and programme priorities;
- Identify other key partners, including national and provincial authorities,

Coordination of programme implementation
- Ensure appropriate coordination with all humanitarian partners (including UN agencies, national and international NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, IOM and other international organizations), as well as with national authorities and local structures;
- Ensure the establishment/maintenance of appropriate sectoral coordination mechanisms, including working groups at the national and, if necessary, local level;
- Promote the integration of the IASC's agreed priority cross-cutting issues, namely human rights, HIV/AIDS, age, gender and environment, utilizing participatory and community based approaches
- Secure commitments from participants in responding to needs and filling gaps, ensuring an appropriate distribution of responsibilities, with clearly defined focal points for specific issues where necessary;
- Promote/encourage participants to work collectively, ensuring the complementarity of the various stakeholders' actions;
- Promote emergency response actions while at the same time considering the need for early recovery planning as well as prevention and risk reduction concerns;
- Ensure effective links with other sector working groups;
- Represent emergency shelter needs in discussions with the UN Resident Coordinator, appropriate Governmental representations, donors and other key agencies on prioritization, resource mobilization and advocacy;
- Act as focal point for inquiries on emergency shelter response plans and operations.

Planning and strategy development
- Needs assessment and analysis, ensuring beneficiary participation including adequate attention given to the needs and challenges by gender and of vulnerable groups;
- Identification of gaps in coverage;
- Developing/updating agreed response strategies and action plans ensuring that these are adequately reflected in overall emergency response strategies.
- Utilizing lessons learned from past activities and beneficiary feedback to revise strategies and action plans accordingly;
- Developing the transition from emergency shelter to longer-term shelter recovery programming, in close consultation with UN Habitat as the focal agency for early recovery, and the handover of the coordination role to other agencies.

Information management
- Development of simple, user-friendly emergency shelter assistance reporting formats in consultation with the local authorities, providers of shelter assistance and other key stakeholders; these reporting formats should include provision for gender desegregation of data and reporting on more vulnerable groups, they should also be complementary to the information collection and reporting systems of other sector working groups;
- Promotion of and training on the use of these reporting tools among shelter assistance providers and other stakeholders;

- Gathering and collation of data on emergency shelter needs and assistance being provided in a timely and efficient manner, including feedback and/or issues raised by the affected population;
- Identification and reporting of any gaps in emergency shelter assistance to the Shelter actors;
- Development and implementation of methods to share this information, as well as broader information on shelter needs and solutions which the shelter actors wants to develop and/or share, with all concerned stakeholders and the affected population; this information may need to be made available in the local language, as well as English, to the maximum extent possible;
- Coordination with other sectors to ensure complementarity and cross-sectoral analysis of information on the disaster response.

Application of standards
- Ensure that the shelter response is guided - to the extent possible - by relevant policy guidelines and technical standards, as well as relevant commitments that the Government has undertaken under international human rights law.

Monitoring and reporting
- Ensure adequate monitoring mechanisms are in place to review the impact of the sector coordination and progress against implementation plans;
- Ensure adequate reporting and effective information sharing, with support from the UN Resident Coordinator or other UN OCHA – appointed overall coordinators.

Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Identify core advocacy concerns, including resource requirements, and contribute to key messages on broader advocacy initiatives;
- Advocate for donors to fund participants to carry out priority activities in the sector concerned, while at the same time encouraging participants to mobilize resources for their activities through their usual channels.

Training and capacity building of national authorities and civil society
- Promote and support training of humanitarian personnel and capacity building of humanitarian partners;
- Support efforts to strengthen the capacity of the national authorities and civil society.

Other
- The Shelter Coordination Team will advise IFRC on the approach to and resources required to provide the required coordination services to the shelter actors. This will comprise discussion with the Federation Representative or his/her designated representative, and the Head of Shelter, IFRC Geneva.
- Provision of adequate handover, including the provision of brief guidance notes and counter-parting where possible.
- Preparation of a short summary report at the conclusion of the assignment on lessons learned.

Guiding Principles

The Shelter coordination Team will, at all times when carrying out this assignment, ensure that he/she adheres to the conditions of the International Federation commitments to undertaking a leading role in emergency shelter in natural disasters, namely:

1. the Federation shall at all times adhere to the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, its policies, procedures as well as those of the Movement, relevant to international disaster response (including the Seville Agreement);
2. the Principle of Independence will be upheld in respect of extra funding required to exercise this lead role;
3. the Federation will not accept accountability obligations beyond those defined in its Constitution and own polices; and
4. the responsibilities of such leadership will be clearly defined, leaving no room for "open ended" or unlimited obligations.

Reporting
The Shelter Coordination Team will report directly to the NRCS Headquarters in Kathmandu or to the person appointed by this Headquarters. The Shelter Department of the Federation will be available for technical support.

The Shelter Coordination Team will liaise closely with the UN Resident Coordinator, national authorities and sector working groups carrying out coordination functions in others sectors/areas.

The Shelter Coordination Team will ensure that the International Federation in country representative is regularly kept informed on the functioning of the Shelter Coordination Team and issues that have or may potentially have an impact on IFRC resources or identity.

Duration
The duration of deployment will be subject to separate discussion and agreement.