EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Distr.
RESTRICTED

EC/58/SC/CRP.23
29 August 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE
40th meeting

Original: ENGLISH

REAL-TIME EVALUATIONS OF UNHCR'S INVOLVEMENT IN OPERATIONS[1] FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND THE CLUSTER APPROACH: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

1.   In January 2007, UNHCR issued a document entitled "Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy: UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response to situations of internal displacement." The primary purpose of the document was to set out the key considerations and principles guiding UNHCR's engagement with internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the context of the United Nations humanitarian reform process, and in particular, within the new institutional arrangements known as the cluster approach. UNHCR committed itself to reviewing some of its IDP programmes and to ensuring that the findings and recommendations of such evaluations would be used to strengthen its contribution to policy making, planning and programming.

2.   Accordingly, between 22 April and 28 July 2007, UNHCR's IDP Advisory Team and Policy Development and Evaluation Service undertook a series of five Real-time Evaluations (RTEs) in those countries where the cluster approach was initially rolled out, i.e. in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Uganda and Somalia, together with Chad where the cluster approach was activated shortly after the evaluation took place.

3.   Reports of the five RTEs will be placed in the public domain,[2] and should be read in conjunction with this paper. They have also been made available to the OCHA-led inter-agency evaluation of the cluster approach, which is expected to be completed in 2008.

II. FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER

4.   This paper provides an analysis of the findings in the five evaluation reports, and is divided into two parts. The first section looks at issues specific to UNHCR's performance, focusing on both the cluster leadership role and the operational activities of the Office. The second summarizes those findings that relate to the humanitarian reform process as a whole.

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[1]   Operations in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Uganda and Somalia
[2]   The RTEs will be published at www.UNHCR.org/research under Policy Development and Evaluation Service

5.   It is important to note that the RTEs were undertaken in conformity with the existing UNHCR policy on evaluations.[3] This paper has already been presented to UNHCR's senior management who are addressing the issues raised in the findings.

III. FINDINGS RELATING TO UNHCR'S CONTRIBUTION UNDER THE CLUSTER APPROACH

A. UNHCR as a cluster leader

6.   UNHCR's experience as cluster lead to date has been shaped by the very different contexts in which the cluster approach has been activated. In general, the evaluation teams assess that UNHCR has performed well, and that in particular its cluster leadership has resulted in tangible progress in forging common visions among cluster partners, and targeting resources more effectively on the basis of jointly defined needs.

7.   Nonetheless, the evaluations also indicate that UNHCR's engagement in the cluster approach entails significant challenges, including that of identifying and deploying experienced staff capable of providing leadership and strategic direction to a diverse group of actors in complex operational environments. In this respect, the evaluation teams found that the performance of the Office had to some extent been limited by shortcomings in its budgetary and staff deployment procedures.

8.   Another challenge has been determining which people are of concern to UNHCR as an agency, as opposed to defining the target population for the purposes of cluster members as a whole. The evaluation teams also found that UNHCR field staff are adapting to their new relationship with cluster members as operational partners, alongside the Office's traditional relationship with "implementing partners" when UNHCR assumes the role of operational agency.

B. The protection cluster

9.   UNHCR's enhanced responsibilities for protection within the cluster approach have required it both to take on a leadership role within the protection cluster at the global and country levels, and to develop its own protection policies and programmes to enhance directly the protection of people of concern to the Office.

10.   In general, the evaluation teams felt that UNHCR has made a substantive and credible contribution as protection cluster lead at the field level, and has succeeded in forging partnerships and facilitating the development of joint protection strategies, which have enhanced the development of projects by cluster members. There is, in general, a high level of engagement in protection cluster working groups at the national and local levels.

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[3]   Readers are asked to note that the findings and recommendations of evaluation papers are those of the evaluation team.

11.   At the national level, senior UNHCR professional staff members generally chair the protection cluster to lead the development of protection strategies, and provide support to field-based clusters. At the field level, the evaluation teams found a heavy reliance on secondees and United Nations Volunteers (UNVs). Protection Standby Capacity (ProCap) staff deployed through the global protection cluster and through other standby arrangements are making an important contribution.

12.   In a number of locations, focal points and/or sub-clusters have been usefully established for specific thematic areas, such as child protection, human rights, sexual and gender-based violence, land and property, and rule of law. The evaluation teams encourage UNHCR and protection cluster members to assume responsibility more actively for a *droit de regard* in promoting the incorporation of protection concerns within all clusters.

13.   The work of the global protection cluster in developing practical guidance for field staff is commended. The evaluation teams encourages its further engagement with protection cluster actors in the Field to assist in the development and utilization of tools for assessing the impact of their programmes on target populations, including progress towards sustainable solutions to displacement and the re-establishment of national protection mechanisms. Additional field guidance is also required on how best to engage with national stakeholders, such as local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights commissions and other civil society actors, in order to support the restoration of national protection capacity, with the objective of mainstreaming protection cluster activities into nationally led programmes. Liberia has already embarked on this process, and should be able to provide some useful lessons for other operations.

C. The camp coordination and camp management cluster

14.   While the camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) cluster has been one of the most active and operational global clusters, it was not activated in all country operations. For example, the evaluation team found that the CCCM cluster in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was not activated owing, to some extent, to concerns about the institutionalization of camps at a time when the trend was toward return, and because most IDPs at the time of cluster activation were living in host communities - a situation which has now changed.

15.   The evaluation teams found an ongoing need for further education on CCCM concepts and the key protection value that the cluster has to offer within a humanitarian response. As the global cluster co-lead for CCCM, the teams encourage UNHCR to continue its work with cluster members and States to agree on terminology and best practices with regard to IDP camps, sites and other group locations (collective centres, urban IDPs and IDPs in host communities).

16.   In terms of the use of the CCCM cluster at the field level, United Nations/Inter-Agency Standing Committee (UN/IASC) Country Teams may wish to consider automatic activation of the CCCM cluster in concert with the protection cluster in situations of large-scale displacement, or where appropriate as a sub-cluster of the protection cluster. Such linkage could preclude response gaps or the establishment of *ad hoc* groups addressing CCCM concepts without appropriate policy guidance or tools. The evaluation teams welcomed the partnerships between the protection cluster and the CCCM cluster that were evident in the collaborative work between

UNHCR, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), OCHA, and the French NGO, CartONG, in Uganda, and in the IDP profiling and information management activities in Chad and Côte d'Ivoire. The teams recommend the further development of such partnerships.

17.   Finally, experience in Liberia has also highlighted the need for the CCCM cluster to encompass all phases of displacement, including camp closure. This includes environmental rehabilitation and the pursuit of local solutions for those who opt not to return.

D. The emergency shelter cluster

18.   The evaluations highlighted the importance of UNHCR's engagement in the emergency shelter cluster, given that it is an essential, life-saving, protection activity which should not only be seen as a component of non-food item delivery. This is particularly the case when shelter is required for an extended period of time. In some of the more complex emergency situations where UNHCR was leading, the evaluations indicated a need to establish clear standards for non-food item assistance packages, including guidance on distribution in situations where the internally displaced have settled close to other affected communities with similar assistance needs.

19.   It was evident that emergency shelter clusters should have a strong early recovery component, with plans for a national shelter strategy that incorporates transitional or permanent shelter needs to complement emergency shelter responses. A good practice identified in this regard involved UN-Habitat as the co-chair with UNHCR of the shelter cluster in Somalia. UN-Habitat's expertise complemented and enabled the cluster to address emergency shelter needs, while it simultaneously worked with the local authorities and municipal councils on long-term housing and urban planning.

E. Resource mobilization and management

20.   The evaluation reports indicate that UNHCR needs to better define the limits of its capacity in terms of funding, material resources and skilled staff in order to determine the extent to which the Office can make future additional contributions to the implementation of the cluster approach. While some increase in effectiveness can be achieved within existing resource ceilings, UNHCR's increased responsibilities as a cluster lead, coupled with growing external expectations, bring into question whether the Office's current position of delivering within current resources levels can remain tenable.

21.   When reviewing UNHCR's experience to date with the cluster approach, the evaluation teams found that field offices do face increased demands as a result of cluster responsibilities and activities. Additional administrative costs may include new field offices, establishing cluster secretariats at the field office level, or contributing staff members to an inter-agency coordination mechanism or integrated mission. The evaluation teams recommend that UNHCR reconsider its existing cap on operational versus administrative expenditures.

22.   Cluster approach operations involving conflict-induced displacement require a high degree of operational flexibility due to the frequently insecure environment and the relatively fast pace of population movements and return. Such responses are even more challenging in the

case of "remote management" operations. The evaluations highlighted that UNHCR's Country Representatives should have greater flexibility to use resources to address unexpected priority needs within their area of responsibility. The present funding mechanisms, programme cycles, and restrictions between Annual and Supplementary Programmes, were reported to have seriously constrained the ability to exercise such flexibility.

23.   In light of these findings, as UNHCR and Executive Committee (ExCom) members review the Office's existing internal budget and administrative rules and the proposed new budget structure, the evaluation teams believe it will be important to ensure that the new structure enables the Office to be a predictable, effective, and flexible partner within the cluster approach.   UNHCR and ExCom members may wish to consider situations such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where it was reported that the imposition of a six-month funding cycle seriously jeopardized UNHCR's credibility because the Office could not effectively participate in forward-planning processes.

F. Human resources

24.   As UNHCR continues to enhance its global emergency response capacity through its Workshops on Emergency Management (WEMs) and its standby rosters with other organizations, the evaluations indicated that the Office also needs to improve its efforts to deploy experienced and capable staff in field operations following these emergency deployments. In many cluster approach operations, cluster leadership coordination responsibilities require dedicated staff members. In this respect, the evaluation teams acknowledge the exceptional support UNHCR is receiving from the Norwegian Refugee Council, amongst other important partners.

25.   The evaluation teams recommend that UNHCR review its current post creation and staff deployment systems to ensure a sufficient number of UNHCR staff members, particularly senior members, can be deployed in a timely manner for adequate periods of time. In addition, the teams encourage the development of staffing models for cluster approach operations, including standard job descriptions and the number of specific posts required to effectively implement such operations. As an interim measure, the evaluation teams recommend that UNHCR consider strengthening its headquarters support to the Field, particularly at the time of any newly activated cluster approach.

G. Staff development

26.   The evaluations indicated that UNHCR should continue its efforts to develop its staff's cluster leadership skills, such as the ability to lead the development of a strategy, to engage in advocacy and resources mobilization, to run meetings effectively, and to manage the many additional relationships that exist between cluster partners. In addition to continuing its progress on incorporating training on internal displacement and the cluster approach within all relevant existing UNHCR training, the Office should consider adapting the OCHA cluster leadership training curriculum and expanding its use within UNHCR.

27.   Once trained, staff members need to be kept up to date. UNHCR has now launched an internal website that provides staff with updated information on UNHCR's role in IDP operations.

H. IDPs and UNHCR's refugee mandate

28.   The evaluation reports confirm that UNHCR's enhanced role under the cluster approach in relation to the internally displaced has so far not had a negative impact on its mandated responsibilities for refugees.   Indeed, in operations where the focus was on return and reintegration of both IDPs and refugees, UNHCR's enhanced role was found to bring benefits to returning refugees.

29.   UNHCR country offices should be encouraged to avoid the creation of parallel structures dealing with refugees and internally displaced people, particularly at the level of senior management, as the evaluation reports suggest that this can result in cluster approach responsibilities being insufficiently prioritized and mainstreamed.

30.   UNHCR is mandated to work in partnership with Governments and other humanitarian actors to ensure protection and assistance for refugees.   That said, there is also a need to collectively pursue equitable treatment for all affected populations.   This is particularly important when refugees, IDPs and others of concern are collocated.   Eastern Chad provided many notable examples in this respect.

I. Security

31.   In several locations, the evaluation teams found that the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) security phases meant that UNHCR and its partners had little or no safe access to affected populations, even under escort.   It is recommended that UNHCR, in concert with its partners, consult UNDSS and integrated missions in an effort to creatively address the need for more flexible security assessments which balance valid security concerns with maximizing safe access to affected populations in insecure environments.

32.   The evaluation teams recognized notable efforts by UNHCR and other cluster approach actors to improve the security environment of the affected communities themselves.   Good practices included distributing mobile phones to populations of concern in inaccessible areas, working closely with local civilian police, and cooperating closely with integrated missions to highlight and respond to security concerns.

IV. FINDINGS RELATING TO INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION WITHIN THE CLUSTER APPROACH

33.   Given the relatively short period of time since the cluster approach was conceived and rolled out to the Field, and the fact that many global cluster tools developed in 2006 have only recently begun to reach country operations, the evaluation teams felt that there is a need for considerable caution in reaching definitive conclusions with regard to its impact and effectiveness.   Nevertheless, the evaluation teams assessed the international community's

response to the needs of affected populations in each of the operations as having been enhanced, to varying degrees, by the introduction of the cluster approach. More specifically, the teams found that the cluster approach has resulted in several positive outcomes:

- providing UN/IASC Country Teams with common understandings, objectives and directions;
- clarifying roles and responsibilities;
- promoting the systematic exchange of information and ideas;
- standardizing concepts, definitions and statistical reporting;
- encouraging the pooling of tools and techniques;
- strengthening resource mobilization;
- strengthening protection and humanitarian advocacy; and
- promoting an improved mind set in relation to coordination and cooperation.

34.   The evaluation teams strongly encourage further policy development and increased training levels. These are considered essential to address better the ongoing lack of engagement by a number of important stakeholders - including some host Governments, many national NGOs, and even some UN/IASC Country Team members.

35.   The evaluation teams also found that at the country level, cross-cutting issues such as HIV and AIDS, the environment and gender, are sometimes at risk of falling through the cracks, despite the proliferation of coordinating structures and procedures which appear to absorb an excessive amount of time and energy in the field. This risk is attributed, in most of the operations visited, to weak inter-cluster coordination mechanisms, including inadequate information analysis and sharing.

A.   Impact on persons of concern

36.   The litmus test, of course, is whether the positive outcomes of the cluster approach summarized above result in tangible, positive and lasting improvements in the lives of affected populations. During the evaluations, the teams sought visible and anecdotal evidence to assess the impact of the cluster approach on populations of concern. While the magnitude and specific impact on affected populations varied depending on the operational context, in each of the five operations visited the evaluation team found many situations in which a correlation could be observed between the implementation of the cluster approach and improved standards in protection, assistance and solutions. This report has already highlighted the positive impact of the co-leadership of the shelter cluster by UNHCR/UN-HABITAT and its pilot project in Bosasso, "Puntland" in north-east Somalia. In addition, initiatives by the protection cluster in northern Uganda – such as the "freedom of movement" advocacy campaign and the building of roads to return areas – contributed to the return of thousands of IDPs from densely populated camps. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, due to the protection cluster's close cooperation and advocacy with the United Nations Observer Mission (MONUC), mobile teams of peacekeepers were deployed to IDP sites in the eastern part of the country to improve security. In Chad, the site management "cluster" worked with IDP committees and local leaders to promote the integration of IDPs into local communities as opposed to living in camps.

37.	The evaluation teams note, however, that baseline data required for a detailed impact assessment was not available when the cluster approach was launched, nor were appropriate standards and indicators. In addition, the complexity of humanitarian crises is such that caution must be exercised in attributing specific developments and trends to a single variable - the introduction of the cluster approach.

## B.	State responsibility

38.	The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement[4] reiterate that the primary responsibility for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons rests with their own Government. To date, all cluster approach responses have been consensual, whether the responses have been in response to natural disasters or to ongoing humanitarian emergencies, and this was the case in each of the five countries evaluated for the purpose of this paper. The experience in Liberia provides a useful example of the centrality of government strategies and of government participation within the cluster approach.

39.	The evaluation teams recommend that the IASC operational guidance reflect the importance of Humanitarian Coordinators and UN Country Team members fully consulting the host Government prior to activation of the cluster approach, including the designation of interlocutors for each of the proposed country level clusters.

## C.	Need for additional inter-agency policy and operational guidance

40.	Considerable efforts have been undertaken by IASC members and global cluster leads to provide the policy guidance that was absent in the early stages of the roll-out. In 2007, UNHCR also developed its own operational policies and guidance in consultation with its Executive Committee members and other humanitarian partners. The evaluation teams encourage other agencies and NGOs to follow suit, since it found that such policies increase predictability.

41.	The evaluation teams also suggest the development of additional practical guidance on the specific responsibilities of a country level cluster lead or co-lead.

## D.	Transition from humanitarian relief to early recovery and development

42.	Early recovery issues continue to be important for UNHCR because they are key factors to ensuring durable solutions for the displaced, and ultimately affect the Office's exit strategies. The evaluation teams believe that UNHCR should continue its active participation in early recovery clusters.

43.	Based on the teams' findings in each of the five operations, the early recovery coordination and programmatic activities are too important to be considered "cross-cutting" issues. It is recommended that the overall scope of cluster approach responses systematically includes the transition phase. To facilitate this broader approach, IASC operational guidance

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4	E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, United Nations, 1998

should be expanded to cover the initial relief efforts, as well as the later return, reintegration and early recovery phases. The evaluation teams also encourage every effort to ensure that early recovery remains a cluster in its own right at the field level with clear "first point of call" and "provider of last resort" responsibilities.

E. Partnerships within the cluster approach

44. This paper has already noted the importance of the host Government's engagement within the cluster approach. With regard to other partners, the evaluation teams found that the cluster approach has enhanced communication between United Nations agencies and international NGOs, and has contributed to the development of a shared vision of needs and priorities. In some operations this had already been translated into common strategies and the development of concrete programmes and advocacy initiatives to address gaps. The increased availability of Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and/or pooled funding has enhanced this process.

45. Despite some lingering skepticism, the evaluation teams noted a high level of engagement by international NGOs. The participation of national NGOs, however, remains limited, and needs to be further encouraged, where appropriate.

46. In a number of the operations evaluated, partnerships also existed with integrated missions. Civilian departments within integrated missions had taken on cluster lead responsibilities. In Liberia, the United Nations Mission (UNMIL) co-leads the rule of law and land/property sub-clusters; while in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUC co-leads the protection cluster with UNHCR. On the whole, this was assessed as beneficial, but it highlights the need for further analysis and guidance on the relationship between the cluster approach and other initiatives to promote United Nations system-wide coherence, including integrated missions, the emerging role of the Peacebuilding Commission, and the "Delivering as One" concept.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE CLUSTER APPROACH

47. The humanitarian reform process represents a bold and imaginative attempt to improve the leadership, predictability, coordination and accountability of the international community's efforts to engage in humanitarian emergency responses to meet the needs of people affected by armed conflict and natural disasters. The cluster approach constitutes one element of that process, and should be viewed in conjunction with the strengthening of the Humanitarian Coordinator system and the effective functioning of the CERF. Nevertheless, the constraints identified by the evaluation teams indicate that the initial parameters for the use of the cluster approach should be maintained while it matures further. For the time being, it should remain a humanitarian emergency, gap-filling mechanism, which is initiated through a process of field-driven decisions.

48. The evaluations suggest that the cluster activation process would benefit from further review. In those four initial ongoing operations where the cluster approach has been used - in Liberia, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and slightly later in Somalia, the sense

of "ownership" varied significantly. Each operation had its own pre-existing coordination structure, response capacity, and operational environment. These, to some extent, dictated the likelihood of success in using the cluster approach.[5]

49. While the cluster approach is regularly used for most international community natural disaster responses, the evaluation teams believe that its use for ongoing humanitarian operations requires a more thorough pre-activation assessment in light of the greater political complexity and security environment in such situations. For such ongoing operations, the evaluation teams consider it premature for the cluster approach to become a standard response mechanism.

50. The evaluation teams believe that an effective cluster approach response to address gaps in ongoing humanitarian operations requires more than the existence of a Humanitarian Coordinator if it is to provide real added value. The teams therefore suggest that in the future, when a Humanitarian Coordinator and UN/IASC Country Team are considering whether the cluster approach will improve the international community's response, their analysis should also include:

1) Analysis of the operational environment: This should include consideration of the extent of host Government engagement; whether sufficient safe access to affected populations exists; whether programme implementation might be obstructed; and whether field staff security considerations are likely to limit its implementation.

2) Analysis of resources needed: This should take into consideration whether there are sufficient humanitarian and development actors available; and whether sufficient donors are engaged and willing to support the response.

3) Analysis of coordination capacity: This should consider whether existing response structures are effective; whether the Humanitarian Coordinator has sufficient support to fulfil his/her additional coordination responsibilities effectively; and whether there is the capacity to provide effective inter-cluster coordination, address cross-cutting issue coordination, and ensure coordinated information management, including effective analysis.

51. The above proposals are intended to increase the likelihood of the successful application of the cluster approach in ongoing emergencies, and should not be perceived as suggesting new pre-requisites for its use.

52. On the issue of available resources, the evaluation teams found the growth in the global pool of resources - in terms of trained staff, materials, operational tools, and funding through the CERF – to be both a welcome development and an outcome of the global cluster working group activities to date. Nevertheless, these real-time evaluations indicate that the needs for such resources continue to be greater than the resources available.

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[5] In Liberia, sectoral structures existed which were easily adapted, and there was a significant international community capacity on the ground to implement it. In northern Uganda, many actors, including UNHCR, had to establish a capacity to implement it – and this delayed effective contributions on their part for as much as a year. In Somalia, security and remote management constraints still limit its effective use. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, security and the huge geographic area in which it is being used continue to detract from its effectiveness.

53.   The UNHCR real-time evaluations also suggest that it would be a responsible course of action at the time of writing to recognize that a consolidation period is needed to ensure greater effectiveness in those countries where the cluster approach has already been activated, and therefore recommends that a considerably more cautious approach be taken with regard to the pace of its further roll-out to ongoing humanitarian operations.

54.   Finally, the evaluation teams recommend that the IASC's further development of the cluster approach take into consideration the findings in this paper, its related real-time evaluation reports, the findings of the ongoing inter-agency evaluation, and field reports from other actors engaged in the cluster approach.