

Evaluation Brief



FAO/WFP Joint Evaluation of Food Security Cluster Coordination in Humanitarian Action

Context

The Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) introduced the cluster system in 2005 as part of a wider reform of the humanitarian system. The cluster system creates coordination mechanisms for key sectors of humanitarian assistance that operate at global level and can be activated where required for specific emergencies. Each cluster has one or two designated lead agencies to facilitate coordination and – as much as their resource limitations will allow – to act as providers of last resort.

In 2010, the Global Food Security Cluster (FSC), co-led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), was created to coordinate food security interventions in emergencies.

The Food Security Cluster

The global FSC has 47 members and a small Global Support Team (GST), based in Rome. The GST facilitates coordination at the global level and supports food security coordination systems in more than 40 countries.

The global FSC supports country-level coordination through surge and support missions, tools, guidance, training and information management. The coordination is expected to improve the capacity of humanitarian organizations to respond strategically and coherently, and to reduce gaps and duplications. Ultimately, it is expected to result in improved services to populations affected by crises and emergencies.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation was jointly commissioned by the Offices of Evaluation of WFP and FAO – the cluster's lead agencies. It contributes to accountability and learning, as a pillar of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Transformative Agenda¹. The evidence was collected through 8 country case studies, interviews with 483 key informants and an electronic survey administered to participants involved in food security coordination in 43 countries. The evaluation assessed:

- i) effects of country and local-level coordination on humanitarian organizations and their activities;
- ii) effects of the global FSC on coordination at the country and local levels; and
- iii) potential effects on affected populations, evidenced by changes in the coverage of humanitarian services and the monitoring of effects on beneficiaries.

Key Findings

Overall, the evaluation found that food security coordination had a positive effect on participating organizations. The results from surveys and key informant interviews showed that while performance varied among countries, the coordination mechanisms assessed made consistent, positive contributions by facilitating networking and helping to build trust; enhancing reporting; identifying and reducing duplication of efforts; and in some cases setting and disseminating standards.

All of the assessed food security coordination mechanisms led by international actors collected information for the 4Ws matrix (who does what, where and when) and exchanged information that helped avoid duplication. For example, in Pakistan, two organizations compared their beneficiary lists and eliminated 1,500 duplications. In the Philippines, two organizations were planning food distributions in the same area and agreed to alternate with each other in that area. In Kenya and Pakistan, coordination structures allocated intervention areas to organizations, thereby avoiding duplication.

As humanitarian organizations were able to reallocate resources to other, underserved areas, these findings suggest that food security coordination had a positive effect on the coverage of services provided, although data is not systematically collected to quantify this effect.

Coordination teams and partners invested considerable effort in System-wide strategic processes such as consolidated appeals or strategic response plans, resulting in more inclusive and comprehensive processes and documents. However, these processes

¹<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/downloaddoc.aspx?docID=5970&type=pdf>

dominated country coordination agendas for many months, taking time away from crucial agency operational responsibilities, and to the detriment in many cases assessed, of cluster operational support.

Most country-level coordination mechanisms did not sufficiently address members' operational needs - especially for coordinated needs assessments; response analysis and gap filling; using information to inform operations and learn from best practice; and enhancing contingency planning and preparedness.

IASC guidance expects clusters to play a role in preparedness. The FSC in Bangladesh focused almost exclusively on preparedness, and showed promising results. In all the other cases examined, food security coordination mechanisms paid very little attention to preparedness, even failing to clarify which coordination arrangements would be activated under different scenarios.

Beyond reporting, the evaluation did not find any efforts by food security coordination mechanisms to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of effects on affected populations. There were also very few systematic attempts to facilitate learning, which could have had an effect on the quality and consistency of responses. Survey findings reflect this imbalance between strong information sharing and weak learning

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Food Security Coordination

The evaluation identified four main factors that explain these constraints: i) time-intensive, system-wide processes and demands, leading to neglect of the operational objectives of coordination; ii) limited inclusion and participation of governments, national and local organizations, and non-traditional humanitarian actors; iii) variable commitment and capacity of lead agencies, alongside inconsistent donor commitment and support to food security coordination; and iv) insufficient clarity on roles, responsibilities and boundaries in the coordination system.

Cost benefit analysis

The direct costs of food security coordination relate primarily to FSC staff time. While a quantitative cost-benefit analysis of food security coordination is not possible, proxy indicators suggest that investments in food security coordination have been worthwhile overall: i) the direct costs of coordination were only a small fraction of the overall food security budget; ii) in the two cases with alternative, internationally led coordination arrangements (Lebanon and Turkey/northern Syrian Arab Republic) humanitarian organizations soon called for cluster-like systems with dedicated coordination capacity and more clearly defined roles, responsibilities and processes; and iii) a clear majority of survey respondents perceived food security coordination as a worthwhile investment. However, the bureaucratic processes involved in coordination, and the time required to comply with them were seen as excessive.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation concludes that effective food security coordination creates clear benefits for humanitarian organizations and increases the coverage of humanitarian services. It is broadly supported by traditional, international humanitarian actors, which see investments in food security coordination as largely worthwhile. However, food security coordination also faces important constraints, which not only prevent coordination mechanisms from reaching their full potential, but also undermine their operational relevance and put their current achievements at risk. Addressing these constraints and strengthening activities that are relevant to operations should therefore be a priority for the lead agencies and the GST.

Recommendations

The following strategic recommendations, presented in order of importance, are supplemented by more detailed suggestions in Annex I of the full evaluation report. They are addressed to the GST, lead agencies, country coordination teams, cluster members, the IASC, humanitarian country teams and the OCHA.

1. Advocate with and support the IASC in revising standard system requirements to make them less time-consuming and more operationally focused.
2. Enhance mentoring for and capacities of coordination teams in focusing on operationally relevant activities.
3. Enhance the GST's capacity and improve the preparation of deployed teams to strengthen coordination capacity.
4. Enhance nationally led coordination mechanisms and/or increase the involvement of government actors in food security coordination mechanisms to enhance national ownership and sustainability.
5. Engage national and local civil society organizations and non-traditional humanitarian actors more closely in food security coordination.
6. Take action to ensure more consistent commitment and capacity of lead agencies in supporting food security coordination, and advocate for enhanced donor commitment to food security coordination.
7. Work with the IASC, OCHA and other clusters to clarify roles and responsibilities in the coordination architecture, and promote more efficient coordination arrangements.



Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at

www.wfp.org/evaluation

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