



FOOD SECURITY CLUSTER

Strengthening Humanitarian Response

Lessons Learned & Good Practices in the Afghanistan Food Security & Agriculture Cluster

Exercise Conducted by WFP/FAO co-led Global Food Security
Cluster

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Synthesis Report

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1. Executive Summary

The Lessons Learned and Good Practices Project was designed to officially document key coordination accomplishments of the Afghanistan Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) and to identify those particular areas where the Lead Agencies' experiences might be useful for other clusters and coordination structures. Three of the most successful areas include the following:

- i. Cluster Co-Management
- ii. Coordination of Assessments
- iii. Support to Quality Programming

2. Methodology

The findings mentioned in this report are the result of consultations with the FSAC Cluster Coordinator and literature reviews. An interview checklist was prepared, where Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs) and NGO partners were asked to outline what worked and what did not work for each section, as well as to provide recommendations for ways to enhance the existing system, where necessary. Preliminary findings and good practices were reviewed by FSAC, and feedback incorporated into this report.

3. Coordination Context

2.1 The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) in Afghanistan was established in 2008 and is co-led by WFP and FAO, with Islamic Relief currently serving as the NGO co-chair. The main aim of the cluster is to provide an action-oriented forum for bringing together national and international humanitarian partners to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in the lives of crisis-affected populations in Afghanistan. FSAC is also operational at sub-national level in all six regions of Afghanistan.

2.2 The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, with growing needs amongst internally displaced people (IDPs), people affected by conflict and natural disaster, communities exposed to communicable diseases and lack of access to basic services. The Cluster Response Plan (2013 CHAP) aims to alleviate these conditions by providing life and livelihood saving assistance to populations known to be in need of emergency response, through coordination of general food distributions, cash & voucher transfers, distribution of agricultural inputs, and income-generating activities (IGA). While the primary objective of these coordination activities is food security, FSAC is increasingly aware of the need to mainstream gender, protection and environmental issues into the scope of its work, to promote a more efficient and targeted response.

4. Co-Management

Lessons Learned:

3.1 The cluster is effectively managed by FAO and WFP Co-Coordinators and the NGO co-chair, Islamic Relief, because all three members have had previous coordination experiences in the field or within the cluster system and bring different but compatible programming knowledge to the table.

3.2 FAO and WFP co-management works well within FSAC, which deals with both emergency response and early recovery activities.

3.3 NGO co-chairs promote greater partnership and links with the NGO community as well as with representatives from civil societies.

3.4 Bi-weekly meetings between the Co-Chair and Co-Leads ensure greater transparency and allow for rapid resolution of issues.

3.5 Monthly FSAC Coordination Meetings are chaired on a quarterly rotational basis between FAO, WFP and NGO co-chair to guarantee impartiality and a more harmonized approach to food security coordination.

3.6 The Co-Management model strengthens accountability and reporting lines. Coordinators cannot take strategic decisions independently without consulting the WFP Head of Program, FAO Emergency Coordinator and NGO co-chair.

3.7 Different roles of UN and NGO co-chairs are clearly spelled out within the Cluster Terms of Reference so as to ensure work consistency and avoid duplication of efforts.

5. Assessments

Assessments are a good practice in Afghanistan because they promote a more harmonized approach to food security analysis and the prioritization of basic humanitarian needs. This in turn facilitates the establishment of a solid evidence base that is used for supporting humanitarian decision-making regarding the level and type of action required to respond to those needs.

Lessons Learned:

4.1 Seasonal Nation-Wide Food Security Assessments (SFSA) are a major source of information regarding food security in the country, targeting over 850 communities and 8,500 households and 150 traders interviews. These assessments are also a good opportunity for collaboration between different partner agencies, NGOs and INGOs. In 2013, 24 partners collected data on behalf of the FSAC.

4.2 SFSA Findings strengthen IPC analysis and the content for the Common Humanitarian Action Plan 2014.

4.3 IPC sub-national trainings in most “regions” ensure that there is sufficient buy-in from certain line ministries and key stakeholders to impact the response analysis of the food security situation.

4.4 Trainings for Assessment data collectors and field supervisors enhance the quality of their performance and strengthen their awareness of different vulnerable groups.

4.5 FSAC ensures that common Assessment Tools are used at sub-national level to facilitate comparability across different sectors and provinces.

4.6 Assessment data is controlled at national level to ensure consistency in the analysis. FSAC receives pre-determined questionnaires in standard formats from sub-national coordination units.

4.7 The FSAC secretariat collects information from partners on a monthly basis so that the cluster can compare actual results against planned figures in the CHAP document. At present, the cluster has 30 partner agencies that report monthly regarding different population categories in need and the type of assistance to be mobilized.

4.8 The new CHAP process will be linked to the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) and will ensure greater prioritization of data on humanitarian needs, which will be validated by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).

6. Support to Quality Programming

There are numerous operational and logistical constraints to addressing important cross-cutting issues in Afghanistan, such as gender, age, protection and the environment. FSAC, however, has worked with appropriate line ministries and technical working groups to begin addressing some of these issues, with a view to coordinating better quality programs.

Lessons Learned:

5.1 FSAC has three national-level Technical Working Groups on, Early Warning Information, Cash & Vouchers, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), which encourage greater NGO participation and collect feedback on different tools and normative guidelines developed by the cluster. The cluster also organizes networking on gender and protection.

5.2 The DRR Working Group is a platform to strengthen coordination efforts with more development-oriented actors and line ministries including, MAIL and ANDMA with their involvement in livelihood enhancement and resilience activities.

5.3 Guidelines on the “do no harm” approach and on protection issues, specifically related to IDPs, were developed with assistance from the global Food Security Cluster’s Protection Advisor, and disseminated in Pashto and Dari local languages.

5.4 A Gender Toolkit was developed with support from the global Food Security Cluster’s Age & Disability Advisor. FSAC encourages its sub-national partners to adapt these tools to their specific context and to fully integrate them in assessments.

5.5 FSAC also considers environmental issues that have a direct impact on the food security situation and has developed an agricultural conservation tool to address issues related to soil degradation, deforestation and desertification.

5.6 A study on “beneficiary feedback and complaints mechanisms,” (BFCMs) was developed by FSAC to improve its accountability towards affected populations and to develop evidence-based guidelines for improved response coordination.

7. Way Forward

Lessons can be learned from FSAC’s overall coordination structure. The clear divide between national and sub-national level activities provides a good platform for the coordination of evidence-based assessments, analysis and response. While the national cluster provides normative guidance on key areas of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, sub-national coordination structures respect the normative guidelines provided and feed into standardized Assessment templates that better facilitate comparability across different areas. The FAO, WFP and NGO co-management system ensures timely emergency responses, while also considering the need for early recovery planning and disaster risk reduction activities. FSAC in fact, also liaises with certain line ministries and more development-oriented actors to begin incorporating resilience-building activities into their interventions. The cluster also actively supports efforts to address the different needs of men, women, girls and boys within a protective environment, while also incorporating beneficiary feedback and complaints into the decision-making process to encourage greater ownership of the response. Upcoming Strategic Plans will continue considering innovative approaches to efficiently bridge the gap between emergency and long-term responses, through effective prioritization of different humanitarian needs.

ANNEX 1 – Glossary of Terms

ANDMA – National Disaster Management

Authority

BFCMs – Beneficiary Feedback and Complaints

Mechanisms

CHAP – Common Humanitarian Action Plan

CC – Cluster Coordinator

CERF – Central Emergency Response Fund

CHF – Common Humanitarian Fund

CLA – Cluster Lead Agency
CRC – Central Review Committee
DRR – Disaster Risk Reduction
EFSA – Emergency Food Security Assessment
FSAC - Food Security and Agriculture Cluster
FSNAU – Food Security and Nutrition Analysis
Unit
gFSC – Global Food Security Cluster
HCT – Humanitarian Country Team

HPC – Humanitarian Program Cycle
IM – Information Management
IP – Implementing Partner
IPC – International Phase Classification
MAIL – Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
Investment
OPS – Online Project System
PCM – Program Cycle Management
SFSA – Seasonal Food Security Assessment

ANNEX 2

“Closing the Gaps - Gender Equality: Policies and Practices in Afghanistan, with a focus on emergency cash transfer, food assistance and home-gardening,” – a study conducted by the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, Afghanistan, February 2013 (Synthesis Report by: Samantha Chattaraj, gFSC).

<http://foodsecuritycluster.net/document/closing-gaps-gender-equality-policies-and-practices-afghanistanwith-focus-emergency-cash>

ANNEX 3

HelpAge Briefing on Food Security Among Crisis Affected Older People in Afghanistan

<http://foodsecuritycluster.net/sites/default/files/Food%20security%20among%20crisis%20affected%20older%20people%20FINAL.pdf>

ANNEX 4

Beneficiary Feedback & Complaint Mechanisms Report July 29, 2013

http://foodsecuritycluster.net/sites/default/files/Beneficiary_Feedback_%26_Complaint_Mechanisms_Report_July_29_2013_Hamza.pdf