

The education cluster in Pakistan

by Brenda Haiplik

The 2005 Pakistan earthquake had devastating effects across all sectors, including education. Recent floods have presented additional challenges for the education cluster which has coordinated the response and recovery activities of most education-focused agencies

During two recent emergencies, the October 2005 earthquake in the North-West Frontier Province and Pakistan-administered Kashmir and the June/July 2007 floods in Balochistan and Sindh provinces, the Cluster Approach was activated, both in the capital city of Islamabad and at the field level in five humanitarian earthquake 'hubs' and in two locations in the flood-affected areas. In mid 2006 earthquake emergency clusters closed and then re-opened as sectoral working groups which are active to date. During the current floods emergency many clusters are active, both in Islamabad and in Quetta, Balochistan and in Karachi, Sindh.

Earthquake response

Education is an important sector within humanitarian response as it provides psychosocial, physical and cognitive protection to children, adolescents and youth and facilitates/catalyses a return to normalcy. Key activities of the cluster have included promotion and application of the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction¹; development of Pakistan-specific guidelines for emergency education; and partnering with Pakistan's Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority (ERRA)² to draft designs for primary school reconstruction.

Around 18,000 students and teachers died and two thirds of schools in affected areas were destroyed. The goal of ERRA is to 'Build Back Better' – to construct seismically-safe schools with well-trained teachers, well-managed schools and active parent-teacher councils.

UNICEF chaired the Islamabad cluster, regularly supported by UNESCO. INGOs with head offices in the capital frequently attended cluster meetings, particularly during the emergency and early relief phases of the response. In mid 2006 ERRA's education programme team created the Education Core Group, a federal-level body responsible for education policy issues. At the request of ERRA, field-level clusters became education working groups, chaired by government and supported 'from behind' by UNICEF.

The overall aims of the field-level clusters were: to ensure coordination of emergency education programmes and activities among the partners engaged in the emergency education response; to facilitate effective sharing of information and data among education cluster partners and across other sector clusters; and to facilitate the exchange of ideas, data, guidelines and solutions to outstanding issues. Members of field clusters included Save the Children (US, UK and Sweden), the Norwegian Refugee Council and the International Rescue Committee. Many national NGOs participated in the cluster system, both during the emergency phase and well into the current reconstruction phase. Education activities within government-run IDP camps continued to receive support from cluster members/partners who were running the remaining camps after the cluster officially closed.

The emergency response through the Cluster Approach helped to bring over 26,000 first-time students to school and enabled parent-teacher associations to become community-based participatory

bodies promoting primary education. Cluster coordination showed provincial and local governments that positive change could occur, that teachers could be trained in psychosocial skills and prepared to mitigate future emergencies and that the capacity of local education departments could be enhanced

As the education sector moved into the recovery and reconstruction phase after March 2006, there was an even greater need for effective coordination but, unfortunately, coordination has not been as effective. Agencies constructing schools are isolated at the field level, often electing to bypass education working group meetings. ERRA's limited capacity to both compile data and communicate it has resulted in duplication of school site allocation, contractors demanding exorbitant prices and overall general confusion about who is doing what where. The education Core Group has only met three times since its formation and has been unable to tackle the large issues of school construction. ERRA and equivalent-level provincial/state bodies do not effectively share information. UNICEF has facilitated several school construction meetings which have assisted in improving coordination. In future emergencies it might be helpful to ensure that effective post-cluster mechanisms are in place. Coordination must continue well into the reconstruction phase.

Floods response

In late June 2007 Cyclone Yemyin swept across southern Sindh and Balochistan provinces causing major flooding. In response, the cluster system was again reactivated in Pakistan. Looking back, many feel this was premature and done without the full support of the government. UNICEF continues to co-chair the education, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), nutrition and protection clusters with the provincial governments of Balochistan and Sindh. The education cluster is

made up of many of the same individuals and organisations who are working in the earthquake response. Valuable experience gained during the time of the earthquake by 'old cluster hands' was immediately put to use during the early days of the floods response.

The frequency of meetings and levels of participation have varied. Clusters were meant to be more strategic in nature, planning and coordinating the response, not just collecting and sharing information. Many cluster heads and participants complained that there were too many meetings, thus over-burdening existing staff performing multiple functions. The floods response did not see an increase in technical personnel arriving in country which meant that many education experts, already fully occupied with heavy earthquake programme responsibilities, had to take on extra, time-consuming flood-related work. The flash appeal process was flawed and the process of reducing project amounts was seen as lacking in transparency. This damaged the credibility of the clusters, particularly among NGOs. Once it was evident that the clusters had no funds to disperse, several NGOs and other agencies lost interest and stopped attending cluster meetings. The assessment process organised through clusters took too long. Again, many organisations went off on their own to conduct more rapid assessments in their geographic areas of interest. Some of this information was shared with clusters but some was not.

As a cluster lead one takes on a huge responsibility and associated secretariat duties – calling cluster members about upcoming meetings, managing the 3W matrix³, producing minutes etc. In both the earthquake and floods responses the cluster co-leads, both in Islamabad and in the field, are UNICEF programme managers, responsible not only for their technical clusters but also



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for managing large and ambitious sectoral programmes. Moreover, wearing the 'two hats' of cluster lead and organisational representative at cluster meetings is a challenge. There is a potential conflict of interest while seeking resources for one's agency on the one hand and, on the other, impartially facilitating and coordinating a number of different agencies and NGOs. A cluster lead must therefore be trained to function with two hats, a skill that is very much personality-based rather than acquired through training.

The cluster has become responsible for being the 'conveyor/conduit of information' between both the government and education sector players. Unfortunately, 'big fish' donors such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have bypassed the cluster system. Provincial governments must take 'the driver's seat' in decreasing duplication, identifying gaps and dictating where funding would be most useful. This has not been easy. Pakistan is a strong sovereign state going through a tense political period and developing new emergency response institutions.

A cluster is a collective entity and its effectiveness can only be gauged

by the collective agreement and interaction of its members. One of the biggest differences between the earthquake and floods clusters has been the nature of engagement. The earthquake was very much about information sharing and coordination whereas the floods has largely been an issue of access to resources from the flash appeal. Many agencies that are independent in terms of resources have remained outside the cluster information flow and this is where the skill of the coordinator is fully tested, given that the only currency which s/he has to trade is coordination.

The OCHA engagement with clusters has to mature as the clusters develop and their leads gain more experience. Training courses cannot provide OCHA staff with the quality training that on-the-job opportunities offer, yet we cannot afford to be training OCHA staff placed to coordinate any given emergency. OCHA might consider having its new staff assist in emergencies, leaving actual coordination to experienced OCHA staff.

Lessons learned

Follow-up to findings and recommendations of the 2006 Real Time Evaluation of the earthquake

UNICEF-supported transitional shelter school in Sindh province.

response would have aided 2007 floods clusters in performing more effectively. Cluster leads – ideally sectoral technical experts – gain support/legitimacy and authority from cluster members through their ability to build and manage consensus among disparate yet equal partners to better ensure quality and effectiveness of response. If roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for cluster heads, government officials and UN and non-UN agencies had been more clearly established early on in the floods response, the effort could have been much more effective and efficient.

Flexibility and adaptation are required when implementing the Cluster Approach. What works in

one emergency might not work so well in another. There is no blueprint for effective cluster use.

Support is needed in the identification and development of national cluster leads, those individuals who will lead the clusters ‘where the action is’ in the field, not in a capital city. National officers are around for the long haul, unlike the majority of international cluster leads who arrive en masse during the emergency phase and whose numbers then gradually decrease.

Pakistan is a One UN pilot country. UN reform created a significant additional stumbling block, particularly during the floods response. The UN is currently

navigating new waters (e.g. one leader, one programme) making it difficult to respond ‘as one’ when no new modality or system has yet been created and/or is in place for either development or emergency settings. The process to date has been one of learning by trial and error in the midst of responding to a new emergency in a politically volatile part of a troubled country.

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1. www.ineesite.org/standards/MSEE_report.pdf
2. www.erra.gov.pk/
3. 3W: Who does What Where. See www.humanitarianinfo.org/IMToolbox/web/02_SP.html