



GLOBAL
FOOD SECURITY CLUSTER
Strengthening Humanitarian Response

Lessons Learned in the Nepal Food Security Cluster

Exercise conducted by the global Food Security Cluster

Synthesis Report

By: gFSC and FSC Nepal Cluster Leads and Partners



Credit: FAO Nepal

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1. Executive Summary

Immediately following the earthquake on 25 April 2015, the Government of Nepal made a formal request to the United Nations for assistance, prompting the activation of the global cluster system in-country. The first Food Security Cluster (FSC) meeting was held the following day at the offices of the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MoAD) where it aimed to establish coordination and communication among humanitarian partners for effective response, prioritize target areas, identify immediate needs and gaps in the earthquake affected districts, and share partners' plans for activities, geographic coverage and financial needs for inclusion in the preparation of the Flash Appeal. At the same time, the FSC established coordination mechanisms at the sub-national levels with support from lead agencies and partners.

Over the course of its activation the FSC aimed to identify needs and gaps, prioritize areas of intervention, coordinate food and livelihood activities, standardize approaches, provide information management support, and facilitate communication and sharing to minimize duplications and reach the most vulnerable populations. In the first few days of the response, however, the cluster faced challenges in obtaining up-to date and sufficiently detailed information from the earthquake affected districts, which subsequently posed challenges in the assessing needs, targeting those most affected and planning interventions. MoAD, as the cluster lead, relied on the support of the co-leads for coordination and communication among the partners, as well as for regular documentation and daily reporting. However, coordination with the Government and the partners was made more challenging due to frequent changes in staffing of the global FSC Coordinator role at the national level. Nevertheless, the cluster did play a crucial role in coordinating the food security response throughout the emergency phase, with further valuable contributions in co-leading three needs assessments which continue to provide essential and unparalleled data for government and partners in the planning of future activities. This lessons learned document captures some of the key learning and best practices from the cluster throughout its period of activation from 26 April to 31 December 2015.

2. Methodology

The methodology for the development of this lessons learned document utilized a variety of approaches to ensure feedback from actors present at the various phases of the response, at national, district and local levels. A review of several key response evaluation documents was undertaken, including the FSC Performance Monitoring Report (August 2015), the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT) Report (November 2015), and the After Action Review Summary Report (December 2015). Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were also held with FSC members in two districts (Gorkha and Sindhupalchok) and questionnaires were sent to those who had held coordinator and IMO roles at national and district levels. Bilateral interviews were also held with key government staff.

3. Preparedness & Rapid-Response Deployment

The preparedness of the cluster was aided by the institutionalization of the government Food Security Cluster in 2008 within the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MoAD) during the Koshi River Flood emergency with quarterly meetings being held on a semi-regular basis since that time.

The existence of the National Disaster Response Framework (NDRF-2013) prior to the disaster was useful in that it clearly lays out; roles and responsibilities for both government and development partners, courses of action, and timeframes for implementation. The document also clarifies the coordination structures at the central and district level which facilitated the work of the FSC.

Emergency Response Preparedness training had also been undertaken in Kathmandu in 2014 focusing on a flood scenario in 18 flood-prone districts in the Terai. Additionally, the Government of Nepal (GoN) had undertaken a Multi-National Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) Tempest Express exercise in 2009 based on a scenario for a major earthquake in the Kathmandu Valley. These preparedness actions likely contributed to the heightened performance of the response overall, as well as the FSC. The active presence of both co-cluster lead agencies (FAO and WFP) in country also contributed to rapid deployment of staff to support the cluster.

The FSC performed both quickly and efficiently throughout the response. The cluster had its first meeting the day following the April 25th earthquake, and was able to establish key coordination mechanisms within days. The FSC facilitated the rapid development of the FSC portion of the Flash Appeal for USD 128 million by April 29th (later revised to USD 98.6 million at end-May). The first food shipments were dispatched to affected areas in Gorkha, Dhading and Sindhupalchowk within four days, while the delivery of agricultural inputs was prioritized to meet the seasonal deadlines, allowing families to return to production.

Lessons Learned:

- 3.1 The government's preparedness measures prior to the response likely contributed to heightened performance across sectors;
- 3.2 Immediate food requirements were met quickly and efficiently due to immediate coordination between GoN, UN and NGO partners;
- 3.3 The recognition of the importance of agriculture in the response was well noted, with partners able to meet the immediate agricultural needs of communities (rice seed, tools, storage facilities, animal supplements)

4. Government Collaboration

Government representatives from the MoAD regularly led the FSC from its first meeting, with meeting locations alternating between the ministry and WFP at the national level. The government relied on the support of the FSC Coordinators to take the lead role in the day-to-day management of the cluster including communication and documentation of FSC meetings. However, it was widely viewed that there was room for improvement in the balance of government and UN management of the cluster. Government collaboration at the national level was hindered by the frequent changing of the

Coordinator (5 successive people between 25 April and 31 December), particularly in the emergency phase of the response. The longest serving coordinator was only in place for four months towards the end of the activation period. The importance of having a strong and well-informed Cluster Coordinator, preferably national, was highlighted repeatedly in the consultations.

At the district level, only Sindhupalchowk had a full-time FSC District Coordinator throughout the entire period of activation although full-time Coordinators were in place in Gorkha, Dhading and Nuwakot from June through August and FSC focal points were identified in the remaining districts. Government coordination at the district levels was particularly strong in some districts with the FSC establishing mechanisms for coordination in the sector which continue to perform and improve well past the deactivation of the global FSC.

Rapid deployment of the Government's Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP) the day after the 25 April earthquake provided critical information within days to the FSC on the impact on household food security, markets and other infrastructure. This was possible because of significant investment by and eight years of close collaboration between WFP and MoAD to establish a network of food security monitors and district food security networks across the country which could be activated in the event of a disaster. Later, management and planning of a Joint Assessment undertaken by the FSC, the Early Recovery and Livelihoods Cluster (ERLC) and other stakeholders, including REACH and the Nepal Red Cross Society, in September 2015 proved more challenging and resulted in some cases in coordination breakdowns with government bodies. Given that it involved several line ministries and, in some cases different divisions within a single line ministry, reaching consensus among all stakeholders on both the objectives of and the timeframe for the Joint Assessment was a particular challenge. The timeline of the assessment data collection was perceived by some in the government to be rushed to fit the contractual timeframes of the leading coordinators (from various UN agencies), and an inappropriate time for capturing realistic household level spending and consumption data – although the Joint Assessment was fielded in September precisely to avoid the largest holiday of the Nepali year in October when consumption patterns are typically much higher than the rest of the year. Ultimately, the final document was deemed highly useful by all parties involved.

The FSC was unsuccessful at designing and implementing an exit and transition strategy that effectively handed over activities to the government. The transition document was completed too late to have been effective and was lacking government commitments to its implementation (dedicated staff and resources). It was suggested that this may have been an outcome of inconsistent support from the co-leads and declining buy-in and ownership of the cluster from the government as the emergency phase graduated into one of recovery. Also at this time, the focus of the line ministries generally moved toward support to the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and the development of the Post-Disaster Recovery Framework (PDRF). At government request, FAO continues to provide support for the government FSC through its ongoing programming.

Lessons Learned:

4.1 Frequent changes in the FSC Coordinator led to communication and coordination issues with government and partners. In future this position should be filled with a longer-term contract;

- 4.2 It was recognized that a national FSC Coordinator, as a replacement for the ever-changing international coordinators, would be more appropriate, however there were challenges in the identification of suitable candidates;
- 4.3 Coordination among the FSC and the Government's Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP) was handled well with clear synergies between the two;
- 4.4 Government respondents noted that the understanding of the function and importance of the overall cluster system at the higher levels of government, including line ministries and agencies, needed to be strengthened, particularly regarding the difference between the existing Government FSC and the global FSC roles and activation, as the two were often confused;
- 4.5 Government perceived a lack of transparency in reporting of financial investment in affected districts, sensing that many partners came to FSC meetings to gather information rather than to share;
- 4.6 Government ownership of assessment data is dependent on their participation in decision making during the design and implementation;
- 4.7 An emphasis on government ownership of the exit strategy from the inception needs to be maintained throughout activation to ensure the take up of agreed transition actions.

5. Assessments

An Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA) was implemented through the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) which utilized the existing capacity of the Nepal Security Forces, Red Cross Volunteers and line agency representatives to collect data at the local level within the first 24 hours; however actual data collection and compilation took nearly 5 days. The FSC benefitted from this initial data until it was able to undertake a more targeted assessment.

The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) was organized by the National Planning Commission (NPC) and development partners with data collection starting in May and finalized in June. Members of the FSC devoted resources to the development of the template for the data collection of the agriculture and the cross cutting areas of livelihoods and employment.

The FSC contributed greatly in terms of the generation and analysis of data for the response and the recovery phases. NeKSAP undertook three rapid food security assessments and published the results within two weeks of the earthquake, on 1 May, 4 May and 8 May respectively. The first in-depth assessment undertaken by NeKSAP, which included a baseline survey of 1,000 sampled households and a concurrent integrated food security phase classification (IPC) exercise, generated the May 2015 document "*A Report on the Food Security Impact of the 2015 Earthquake*" which provided guidance to the government and partners in targeting of food security inputs in the initial phases of the response. A second assessment document produced by the FSC in June 2015, "*Agricultural Livelihoods Impact Appraisal in the 6 Most-Affected Districts*", focused more specifically on agricultural livelihoods and contributed to the improved targeting of support to the agricultural sector and associated livelihoods. This assessment came about from a group of NGOs within the FSC which felt that agriculture needed to be better reflected within the regular discussions of the FSC.

Lastly, the *Joint Assessment of Food Security, Livelihoods and Early Recovery* (November 2015), already aforementioned, was a unique cross-sectoral endeavor which brought together a team of international and national analysts. This was a follow-up survey to the baseline assessment conducted in the immediate aftermath of the April 25 earthquake sampling more than 4,000 households (in comparison to 1,000 households in May) across the 11 worst-affected districts outside the Kathmandu Valley. The assessment found that there had been a significant improvement in the food security situation across all indicators (Food Consumption Score, Dietary Diversity Score, Food Expenditure Share, Food Based/Reduced coping Index, Need for food assistance, Access to food market, Food availability at the market) compared to the May assessment with a reduction in the number of people in *immediate need* from 1.4 million to 340,000. However, the assessment also found that pockets of food insecurity and vulnerability remained along specific lines; geographic area (district, elevation and urban/rural) and population group (caste, ethnicity and livelihood). The final product is a comprehensive document with strong analysis which is proving very useful for the government and its partners.

Lessons Learned:

- 5.1 The undertaking of an agriculture specific needs assessment was appropriate in a highly agriculture-dependent country and useful for the targeting of inputs;
- 5.2 The timing of the Joint Assessment needed to be agreed with government partners. It was perceived as influenced by the schedules of development partner staff which led to divisions with government partners;
- 5.3 The data collected and disseminated by the FSC benefitted through close collaboration and synergy with the existing GoN/NeKSAP;

6. Information Management and Communications

The Information Management Officer function of the FSC performed well, however there were several recommendations for improvement in this area in future responses. The Information Management Tool of the global Food Security Cluster was not used due to the complexity of the context and the lack of staff trained in data entry. Poor internet connections also prevented the direct upload of information on which the system was based. Partners were also unable to provide detailed plans for regular submission in the early days of the response, making the tool unsuitable at that stage.

The 3Ws document worked well. FSC members did offer suggestions for its improvement, including the broadening of the categories for activity reporting, the further standardization of reporting units, and clarification on the areas of overlap with the ERLC and the Cash Working Groups which sprung up in some districts later in the response phase. There was consistent difficulty in gathering information from partners beyond the co-lead agencies, with a reluctance of NGOs to submit requested forms. This supports the government perception that many agencies view the cluster as a source of information rather than a participatory mechanism for coordination and transparency. Suggestions for improving reporting focused on closer government management and follow up as per the government FSC mandate.

While planned and discussed, the handover of the IMO responsibilities to a government counterpart was not successfully achieved during the activation period. Training was provided to staff from MoAD in the use and management of the databases and collection tools, however the trained staff members were never appointed to the responsible position, and at the time of deactivation there was no IMO identified within the resumed government FSC structure. NGO staff trained at the same event also showed little improvement in data submission and quality. FAO continues to support the government FSC in this regard.

Lessons Learned:

- 6.1 Identification of appropriate staff to receive training is vital. The participants for the MoAD data collection and analysis training did not go on to work in IM for the cluster;
- 6.2 The 3Ws needs to be broadened in the categories of activities and customized for the context of the local response;
- 6.3 The role of the Inter-Cluster Coordination (ICC) /OCHA in data collection and reporting was very one-directional, with little feedback and analysis returned, despite the frequent submission of data, which was demotivating for partners in regards to regular and timely data submission;
- 6.4 It is important that the IMOs are selected based on analysis and writing skills, not solely on data processing and management skills;
- 6.5 Government request for data submission by partners (at local and national levels) may increase compliance.

7. Coordination & Response Quality

The FSC met daily in the initial aftermath of the disaster, eventually decreasing to bi-weekly and then monthly meetings as the situation normalized. Throughout the response, the FSC delivered on the 3Ws information collection and dissemination, and meetings were perceived to be useful and well-organized. The FSC undertook a specific assessment to gauge its performance in August, an idea which helped it to improve and redirect its energies to the needs of the members.

Overall the coordination performance of the FSC was adequate, however the role of the FSC Coordinator was held by no less than 5 different staff in the first six months of the response, which led to confusion in several areas, particularly with government counterparts who at times felt a lack of consistency in support from the co-leads, and improper handover between the successive coordinators.

A decision was made to hire a national Cluster Coordinator; however the recruited staff did not have the requisite leadership experience and lacked an understanding of the importance of coordination and communication amongst partners and government. Consequently WFP and FAO staff members had to informally assume coordinator responsibilities to ensure the continuation of key cluster functions. During this period (September to December 2015) the FSC faced increasing difficulties with coordination as membership and attendance at meetings began to dwindle, partners became increasingly reluctant to share information regarding their plans and implementation progress, and the government continued to rely on the co-leads for the leadership role. As a result district FSC staff felt that there was a lack of support and communication from the national level, often unsure of who was coordinating. The

continuous presence of the IMO was a saving grace in this regard, which kept the lines of communication and sharing open throughout the activation period.

At the district level, local arrangements were adopted which led to the FSC effectively operating at that level. In two districts full time staff members were employed specifically for the FSC, Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk. However, in other districts Focal Points from cluster partners (Samaritans Purse, Oxfam, PIN and Save the Children) filled the role of District Cluster Coordinator. WFP staff served as Focal Points in Ramechhap, Dolakha and Okhaldhunga districts and FAO staff served in Sindhupalchowk. In some ways the independence in the arrangements and management of the FSC at the district level was a strength contributing to higher performance.

Lastly, there were key areas in which it was suggested clarity in the coordination would increase response quality. Several respondents noted that the role of the ICC mechanism, which many felt should have offered concrete and systematic technical support beyond the constant requests for data (which were required daily far into the response), needs to be operationally clarified at the national and global levels. Additionally, cash monitoring was conducted by several agencies and/or Working Groups which led to unreliable data amongst any one of the regularly released datasets. And finally, the overlap of data collection and meeting participation between the FSC and the ERLC was found to be a burden for some members who were quite time constrained early in the response.

Lessons Learned:

- 7.1 It was recommended that a communication strategy from the UN is necessary regarding the cluster system as a whole, in addition to each cluster, in particular regarding the difference in Government FSC and global FSC, 'activation' and 'deactivation, as well as the intended support and handover to government bodies by co-leads. This strategy should take into consideration Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) measures between national and district levels, as well as between districts and VDCs;
- 7.2 Inter Cluster Coordination mechanism (ICC) – could be clearer in its objectives and intended support role. It was widely noted that each new meeting brought new international staff without proper handovers who sought information previously shared by the clusters. A global review of this structure was recommended;
- 7.3 Overall, the short-term contracts of many internationals at the national level, leading to high turnover, were seen as a barrier to FSC performance. This insight is in line with the STAIT and After Action Review findings which recommended to avoid such contracts;
- 7.4 The use of existing national staff with local knowledge and relationships would be highly preferable to the short-term international staff for many roles; in particular experienced staff (national) staff for the role of FSC Coordinator;
- 7.5 ERLC and FSC overlap was a significant issue at the national and district levels particularly with responsibilities for "Livelihoods" beyond early recovery. In two districts, UNDP supported the transition of the ERL Cluster into broader coordination platforms which were not coordinated with the government's National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) causing confusion in roles for ongoing FSC work in the districts. Additionally, bulletins and information disseminated by the varying groups (FSC, Livelihoods Working Groups, DFSN (NeKSAP) would have benefitted from further integration);

clarifications of roles, overlap in mandate and potential synergies between the two clusters was recommended at the global level.

7.6 FSC discussions were successful in bringing village level issues to the FSC, which were then addressed by the appropriate agencies operating in the areas;

7.7 Cash monitoring was undertaken by several clusters as well as the Cash Working Group which created confusion and unreliable data;

7.8 Overall, the FSC was seen as very useful for avoiding duplication, maximizing resources, and ensuring donor awareness.

ANNEX 1 – Glossary of Terms

CLAs – Cluster Lead Agencies
CTP – Cash Transfer Programming
DADO – District Agricultural Development Office
DFSN – District Food Security Network
ERL – Early Recovery & Livelihoods Cluster
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FSC – Food Security Cluster
gFSC – Global Food Security Cluster
GoN – Government of Nepal
GST – Global Support Team
HCT – Humanitarian Country Team
IASC – Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IM – Information Management
IPC – Integrated Phase Classification
LWG – Livelihood Working Group
MoAD– Ministry of Agricultural Development
MIRA - Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment
MoUs – Memorandums of Understanding
NeKSAP –Nepal Food Security Monitoring System
NPC – National Planning Commission
NRA – National Reconstruction Authority
OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PCM – Program Cycle Management
PDRF – Post-Disaster Recovery Framework
SRP - Strategic Response Plan
STAIT - Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
TORs – Terms of Reference
WFP – World Food Programme

ANNEX 2 – Report on the food security impact of the 2015 earthquake - May 2015

<http://fscluster.org/nepal/document/fsc-nepal-earthquake-food-security-2>

ANNEX 3 - Agricultural livelihoods impact appraisal in 6 most-affected districts – June 2015

<http://fscluster.org/nepal/document/nepal-food-security-cluster-agricultural-0>

ANNEX 4 – Joint Assessment of Food Security, Livelihoods and Early Recovery - November 2015

<http://fscluster.org/nepal/document/joint-assessment-food-security>