1. Introduction

This document provides practical guidance to support cluster performance management and learning. It was developed for use by the WASH Clusters at country level but may equally be useful to other clusters.

The IASC Guidance Note states it is the responsibility of the Cluster Lead at country level to ensure predictable action in “drawing lessons learned from past activities and revising strategies accordingly” (IASC, 2006).

The guidance and toolkit described in this document has been developed as a result of learning from WASH cluster reviews carried out by the Learning Project; consultations with global, regional and country level WASH actors regarding learning, evaluation and the draft Performance Review Tool (PRT); and an element of desk research.

Evaluations are important to the process of learning from experience and improving upon past performance. However, it is apparent that WASH clusters are often facing the following challenges with regard to evaluation.

- It is difficult to get cluster partners to commit time and resources to participate in an evaluation.
- Evaluations are often not very insightful as a result of lack of monitoring information and data available for analysis.
- Evaluations are often a one-off event with little follow-up and lack of resultant improvement in the WASH response.

This guidance has been developed to help Cluster Coordinators and partners find ways to overcome these challenges and identify approaches for performance management and learning that are effective and realistic to implement in their given context.

2. A Process-Based Approach

It is important to consider performance management, monitoring, evaluation, learning and improvement as a process, with identifiable inputs, activities and outputs, rather than individual activities / events. There are four key elements of the process: Planning; Monitoring; Reviewing; and Revising. These steps should take place routinely as part of the project cycle. In the early days of an emergency, or when resources are particularly stretched, the stages or steps may be condensed or may take place in parallel with each other.

Figure 1: A process-based approach

Adapted from the Performance Management Cycle

The next sections provide more detail relating to each of the above steps.

2.1 Planning

It is critical to sensitise and involve WASH actors at the planning stage, because without engagement no change will result.

Performance improvement is about people and their ability to reflect and change / improve their knowledge, understanding and ways of behaving, in order to better achieve their objectives.

The first step is for WASH partners to agree the objectives of cluster performance management / learning activities, for example:
Briefing for Emergency Response

Cluster Performance Management & Learning

- To provide a baseline against which to measure future performance and achievements of the WASH Cluster;
- Partnership building through negotiation and agreement of Cluster performance measures;
- A system of checks and balances to support the implementation of the Cluster strategy;
- Evaluation as a tool for strengthening accountability (upwards / downwards / amongst Cluster partners);
- Lesson learning as an input to address shortcomings in the response in the short term;
- Lesson learning as an input to medium / long term strategies and plans.

The objectives will depend on the timing, context and perceptions about what can be realistically achieved with the resources available.

The next steps will be to identify representatives from the WASH Cluster to coordinate activities, agree resource / budget requirements (e.g. the need for an external facilitator), agree activities (related to monitoring, review and learning) and associated timescales.

Refer to the Performance Review Tool (Mobilisation Pack, Performance Framework), WASH Cluster Learning Project.

2.2 Monitoring

Ongoing monitoring is important to ensure achievement of objectives and improved effectiveness of the response. Consider the following when identifying indicators against which to monitor.

- Indicators should be linked to the strategic objectives of the cluster / sector.
- There is often a tendency to focus on quantitative indicators but qualitative data and indicators are also important, especially for accountability.

"People’s stories provide a critical window and reveal a great deal about the invisible forces that shape tangible phenomena" (INTRAC, 2007).

- The number of indicators should be minimised to focus on priority areas.
- Consider both lag (results) and lead (the processes that lead to the results) indicators. This will help ensure understanding of both what happened and why.

The process of monitoring should be kept as simple as possible, favouring efficiency over comprehensiveness. Where possible, make use of existing mechanisms rather than arranging specific trips, meetings or workshops for collecting qualitative information. For example, Cluster coordination meetings provide a good opportunity to collect information such as perceptions about cluster coordination and lessons learned related to the response. Operational visits to the field provide a good opportunity for Cluster partners to collect monitoring data and feedback.

Refer to:
- The WASH Cluster Monitoring Tool, WASH Cluster Information Management Project.
- The Cluster Coordinator Handbook, (sections 4.2, 5.2.5, 7.3), WASH Cluster Training for Capacity Building Project.
- The Performance Review Tool (Performance Measures, Questionnaires, Quick Analysis Tool), WASH Cluster Learning Project.
- The Good Programming Checklist, WASH Cluster Accountability Project.

2.3 Reviewing

There are many different options available for carrying out cluster-related reviews in an emergency context (see Figure 2 below). The most appropriate method of review may be selected according to the following criteria.

- Primary objective of the review e.g. accountability, learning or both.
- Stage of the emergency e.g. baseline, mid-term, after action review.
- Availability of monitoring data.
- Availability of resources to support the review process.
**Figure 2: Approaches to carrying out Cluster learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Advantages / Disadvantages</th>
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| Joint Review | Regularly throughout the response | **Advantages**
| | | Provides an essential link between monitoring data and the Cluster strategy and plans. Strengthens accountability. |
| | | **Disadvantages**
| | | Tendency to focus more on quantitative rather than qualitative data; more on accountability than learning. |
| Cluster performance review | 2-6 months from the start of an emergency and then annually | **Advantages**
| | | Framework specifically developed to review the performance of the Cluster against IASC Terms of Reference (IASC, 2006), and to promote accountability and learning. |
| | | **Disadvantages**
| | | More emphasis on Cluster processes than the effectiveness of programme delivery. |
| Real-time evaluation | Usually appropriate for the early stages of the response. | **Advantages**
| | | A useful tool for managing organisational risk in major operations. Light exercises carried out by an evaluation team of one to four people. |
| | | **Disadvantages**
| | | Not a comprehensive review. Main audience is WASH actors. More emphasis on learning than accountability. |
| Evaluation of Humanitarian Action (EHA) | Various | **Advantages**
| | | The aim is to bring the reality in the field back to decision-makers at the global level. |
| | | **Disadvantages**
| | | Country studies are not equivalent to full evaluations of the humanitarian response at country-level. |
| Lesson-learning workshops / after-action reviews (AARs) | During / after action | **Advantages**
| | | Participatory approach supports learning. Can be arranged at the convenience of WASH actors, to fit around operational priorities. |
| | | **Disadvantages**
| | | Risk of no follow-up action from one-off events. |
| Impact assessment | Baseline and after action. | **Advantages**
| | | Crucial to understanding the differences we make and enabling us to achieve more and better impact in the future. |
| | | **Disadvantages**
| | | Very difficult to identify the impact of specific programmatic / Cluster activities. The assessment is unlikely to show long-term impacts. |
The following good practices should be taken into account for all reviews.

- **Self-assessment** – there is growing recognition that the findings of reviews will not be valued and recommendations will not be implemented unless there is some form of self-evaluation involved. The most effective way of doing this is to involve WASH actors throughout the evaluation process.

- **Accountability** – reviews are an important way of engaging with the affected population for the purpose of receiving their input, feedback and complaints.

- **Balance of different methods and tools** – using a mixture of different sources, methods and perspectives (e.g. working in team, using multiple data sources and collecting both quantitative and qualitative data) offsets bias in any method.

- **Linking assessment with action** – stakeholder participation in defining recommendations will increase the chances of effective implementation. Recommendations should be action-oriented and realistic in the given context, with responsibility, timescale and follow-up clearly specified.

Refer to:
- The Performance Review Toolkit, PRT (provides flexible support for carrying out reviews), WASH Cluster Learning Project.
- The WASH Good Programming Checklist, WASH Cluster Accountability Project.

### 2.4 Revising

The link between assessment and action is critical. Learning from monitoring and review exercises will only add value if it is integrated into programming. It is not sufficient to merely generate data and information if it is not then analysed and disseminated in way which enables all stakeholders to learn and adapt their behaviour and interventions accordingly. The following are critical considerations:

- **Communication** - it is important that learning and good practice are communicated in such a way that encourages Cluster partners to adopt good practices and incorporate lessons. Identification of accessible and appropriate communication channels and emphasis on practical lesson learning are critical.

- **An integrated approach** – monitoring, reviews and subsequent learning activities should be linked and integral to operations, with learning encouraged and supported (adequately resourced and rewarded).

> “What is clear, is that when AARs are constructed as ‘mission critical’ exercises dealing with issues central to organization(s), they can achieve amazing results.” (Sexton, 2003).

There are many different ways of building learning into programming, for example:

- WASH Cluster coordination meetings, exchanges and networking;
- Technical Working Groups (TWIGs), focus groups, advocacy groups;
- On-the-job learning through coaching and mentoring;
- Briefings, debriefings and handovers;
- Global WASH Technical Support Services;
- Training and capacity building activities;
- Online portals and forums e.g. Reliefweb;
- Evidence-based research that is fed back into programming.

Refer to:
- The WASH Cluster Training and Capacity Building Project
- The WASH Cluster Technical Support Project
- The WASH Cluster Accountability Project
Further Information

ACT Development (n.d.). A guide to assessing our contribution to change.


Global Public Policy Institute, GPPI (2009). Inception Report: Cluster Evaluation Phase II. Commissioned by OCHA.


Further Information cont.


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The Global WASH Cluster, led by UNICEF, was established as part of international humanitarian reform, and provides an open, formal platform for all emergency WASH actors to work together.


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