

The Cluster Approach in northern Uganda

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**NORWEGIAN
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The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) strongly believes that the Cluster Approach holds promise for improving the international response to internal displacement. The approach represents a serious attempt by the UN, NGOs, international organisations and governments to address critical gaps in the humanitarian system. We want this reform effort to succeed and to play an active role in northern Uganda to support the work of the clusters and improve their effectiveness.

The introduction of the Cluster Approach in Uganda must be recognised for the role it has played in maintaining focus on the humanitarian crisis that continues to affect a significant proportion of the population across northern Uganda. The Cluster Approach has resulted in a more coherent and consistent policy response from the UN and humanitarian community, working to balance the priorities of ensuring freedom of movement and freedom of choice for IDPs and continued provision of assistance to people in camps. The challenge that remains will be to see how the Cluster Approach develops in line with the improving situation on the ground, most notably responding to movement from humanitarian relief to transition and early recovery, and ultimately to a post-conflict environment. Investment and support for the transition to a post-conflict environment must be done in such a way to ensure protection and assistance to IDPs and refugees throughout the region, regardless of their location.

Awareness and leadership

Effective implementation of the clusters depends largely on the ability of the cluster leads, headed by the Humanitarian Coordinator, to hold the Government of Uganda (GoU) accountable for its actions. To date the linkages between the cluster leads and the Humanitarian Coordinator remain tenuous, with weak leadership as a result. The unsuccessful introduction of a stand-alone Humanitarian Coordinator for Uganda was a disappointment.

To ensure better implementation, cluster leads and members must

have a better understanding of the process, particularly with regard to tools, planning and strategic planning. The GoU must be brought on board, informed about the process and, where possible, included in coordination mechanisms.

Coordination

Despite the proliferation of coordination mechanisms, led by the UN, NGOs and the GoU, coordination still remains insufficient. As a result, many feel that little real decision making and follow-up take place in the clusters. Furthermore, local government officials lack clear understanding of the roles in the clusters and how they can push for action. A key challenge remains the capacity of the clusters to be all-inclusive (involving not only the UN and international NGOs but also national NGOs and, at district level, local NGOs and community-based organisations) and to establish clear linkages with the GoU and local government. Lastly, the clusters continue to fail to recognise that coordination amongst all actors will be most successful when it respects and reflects the priorities set by communities as well as by local and national government bodies. If the Cluster Approach is to be successful, a participatory approach must be the basis for coordinated interventions across northern Uganda.

Clusters in the context of transition

At this moment of cautious optimism in Uganda, the Cluster Approach should prioritise working towards a gradual and smooth transition from humanitarian aid to long-term development assistance. NRC looks

forward to supporting the important role UNDP is beginning to play in developing and implementing the Early Recovery Cluster. For many actors in Uganda, it continues to be unclear that UNDP is responsible for this cluster; it is also unclear how it relates to other sector working groups and especially to clusters where there appears to be significant overlap in activities e.g. food security, non food items and protection.

Conclusion

The Cluster Approach is now at last actively working to improve humanitarian response and coordination in Uganda. We have seen improvements in coordination, service delivery and protection of IDPs and returnees in northern Uganda. However, much work is still needed to realise the full benefits of an inclusive Cluster Approach where all relevant actors are included as partners. With more attention to and progress on leadership and coordination, inclusiveness and the transition to early recovery by the clusters, we expect the rights of IDPs to be better met.

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The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) works to provide assistance and protection to refugees and displaced people in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

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The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is part of NRC and is an international non-profit organisation that monitors internal displacement caused by conflicts.

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