Communication in Humanitarian Emergency Response: Inclusion of Local and National Actors in Cluster Coordination

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S2062852
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Writing a Master thesis is an adventure; it starts with an idea of where you want to go, and when exploring the idea further, you are repeatedly sidetracked, confronted with new questions or suffering from a temporary writer’s block. I was told by experienced academic writers that this is a normal process and they proved to be right. During my adventure I received support from different people at various phases in the process.

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Saskia Homoet

Groningen, December 2011

“Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world”
( Nelson Mandela)
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### Acronyms

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<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAFOD</td>
<td>Catholic Agency for Overseas Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Common Appeals Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCCM</td>
<td>Camp Coordination Camp Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>CERF</td>
<td>Central Emergency Relief Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERC</td>
<td>Emergency Response Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agricultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GHP</td>
<td>Global Humanitarian Platform</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoY</td>
<td>Government of Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>Humanitarian Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCT</td>
<td>Humanitarian Country Team</td>
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<td>HFY</td>
<td>Humanitarian Forum Yemen</td>
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<tr>
<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICVA</td>
<td>International Council of Overseas Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDMC</td>
<td>Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organisation for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNGO</td>
<td>Local Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NASCRA</td>
<td>National Sub Committee for Refugees Association</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NOHA</td>
<td>Network on Humanitarian Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>MYR</td>
<td>Mid Year Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTE</td>
<td>Real Time Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNOCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>YHRP</td>
<td>Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan</td>
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<td>YRCS</td>
<td>Yemen Red Crescent Society</td>
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Adequate and efficient coordination has been one of the main challenges aid organisations are faced with when in the field. Recent examples, like Haiti, have shown that inadequate coordination has a detrimental effect on aid provision to beneficiaries on the one hand and on already negatively biased opinion about the efficacy and transparency of humanitarian aid on the other. In many articles on coordination various problems were described such as the problem of leadership, optimization of communication in cooperating with all the stakeholders in the field, psychological factors such as mutual trust and confidence, skill of relationship building at operational as well as strategic level and the peripheral position of local and national NGOs. (Moore, Overland, Stephenson)

Since 1990 the amount of humanitarian emergencies have increased noticeably as well as the number of humanitarian agencies. The growing number of agencies has hampered the coordination of resources and activities involved in humanitarian aid operations. (Moore et al, 305) This is one of the reasons, that has led to huge failures in the provision of aid by the international community, for example in Rwanda and Kosovo. As a reaction to the Darfur crisis in 2004, when the international community realised how little had been done to save the lives of thousands of people, the Humanitarian Reform was established in 2005, initiated by the UN Emergency Response Coordinator Jan Egeland. The Humanitarian Reform sought to address gaps in humanitarian response to humanitarian crises and to improve timeliness, effectiveness and predictability. The cluster approach was introduced as part of the reform effort to address challenges of coordination for all the major areas of humanitarian response, such as health, food, shelter etc. UN agencies were appointed as cluster leads and were responsible “for strengthening system wide preparedness and technical capacity and ensuring predictable leadership, accountability and partnership”. (Steets et al. 24)

To evaluate the functioning of the cluster approach, a research committee viewed the performance and process of the cluster approach. One of the aspects mentioned in the evaluation that needed improvement was the effective engagement of local and national NGOs and INGOs in the cluster. For the 2nd phase evaluation the effective operation and the cluster system’s impact on “humanitarian outcomes” (Steets et al.11), to what extent the cluster approach was effective for those receiving aid, was researched in six countries; Chad, Myanmar, Haiti, DRC, Uganda, OPT. The results were published in the Synthesis Report of
Cluster Approach Evaluation in April 2010. Although there were many positive results, the main challenges to be seen in the operation of the cluster approach are the degree of inclusion of local and national actors which had a negative effect on national and local ownership; poor cluster management; the endangering of the principle of independence, due to financial dependence on cluster lead organizations who are part of an integrated mission; and ineffectiveness of inter cluster coordination.( Steets, 10)

Also in a guest lecture by Evert van Bodegom, representative of ICCO at the NOHA Master course in March 2011, the problems mentioned above were confirmed; that the bypassing of local capacities in the cluster system, leadership and creation of surge capacities in harmonious cooperation between international and local NGOs are ongoing issues in humanitarian interventions.

In this study the focus will be on the involvement of local and national NGOs in aid and emergency response within the cluster process in general and in Yemen in particular. Local and national organizations’ involvement is of paramount importance for local capacity building and ownership and ensuring sustainability of humanitarian intervention efforts. The fact that, especially in the case of a natural disaster, it is the local organisations and local people who provide the initial emergency aid, testifies to the need for involvement and support of local organisations. The rational for choosing Yemen was motivated by the fact that at the moment many humanitarian actors are present in Yemen due to the huge political and humanitarian crisis the country is confronted with on top of having to deal with a large influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees; by late 2010 there was an estimated number of 224.000 IDPs (IDMC) and 190.000 refugees (UNHCR) in the country. The cluster approach in Yemen is fairly new; it was not rolled out in Yemen until end of 2009 (CCCM,6), and therefore not much research is done yet on the functioning of the clusters in Yemen in general and the involvement of local and national organisations in particular.

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1 Ownership refers to national and local governmental and civil society/private institutions ( Steets et al. Inception Report)

2 In the humanitarian context, surge capacity can be defined as the ‘ability of an organisation to rapidly and effectively increase [the sum of] its available resources in a specific geographic location’, in order to meet increased demand to stabilise or alleviate suffering in any given population. Source: People In Aid, 2008.

3 The ALNAP Case study on the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, mentions that the local response, having a greater knowledge of the local context and how to overcome operational constraints, was far better equipped to respond to the disaster than the centralized international emergency response. (3)
The degree to which local and national organisations may be included in the cluster coordinating mechanism, deals with the quality of communication between the various stakeholders. According to Sommers “(…) coordination is essentially a method of getting institutions to work together,( but) it is clearly not synonymous with togetherness” (15) ; he further explains this by saying that often an individual’s behavior is shaped by suspicion or distrust and this may influence relationships negatively and is the cause for enduring misunderstandings. These mechanisms may also play a role in the communication between local/national and international organizations.

In this study, communication mechanisms between local/national and international organisations will be validated by general theory of communication. Simply put, communication theory deals with what information is communicated to whom, by means of which channel and in what form. Getting people or organisations to work together, as this is what coordination entails according to Sommers, knowledge of communication theory may help actors to become aware of how they communicate. Especially in the multicultural, pluralist context of humanitarian emergencies, where the cluster approach is a tool for coordination, knowledge of communication theory is essential to improve the effectiveness of communication between actors by having a better informed debate about how they communicate in cluster coordination.

The goal of this study is to discover how lessons learned from the cluster approach activities in other countries may serve as a guideline for improving the position and commitment of local and national NGOs in humanitarian response in Yemen, to stimulate local and national ownership. Furthermore, to become aware of the communication mechanisms that play a role in the cooperation between international NGOs and UN versus the local and national organisations.

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. What designated role of local and national organisations is foreseen in the international humanitarian cluster approach?
2. What is the extent to which the quality of communication determines the actual degree of inclusion of these actors in the clusters with specific reference to the situation in Yemen?”
**Research Assumption:**

Local and national actors are excluded from the process of cluster coordination due to the way international organisations factually communicate with them.

To be able to answer the main research questions above the following sub questions have been formulated:

1. What is the cluster approach and how does it function?
2. How are local and national actors included in the cluster process and what role do communication mechanisms play in relation to the inclusion of local and national actors?
3. According to the cluster approach evaluation reports, what has been the actual level of proper communication tools for the benefit of including local and national actors? To what extent do the findings of evaluators, voices from local and national actors and results of scientific research agree on the position of local organisations in the cluster process?
4. How do communication mechanisms encourage inclusion of local and national organisations in the cluster process in Yemen and do they?

The study is composed of four main chapters. In the first chapter, which consists of the literature review, three topics will be discussed. These are, firstly, the concept of the cluster approach; this will be discussed in-depth in order to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of the cluster coordination process. Secondly will be explained to what extent local and national actors of the six countries presented in the evaluation report were included in the cluster process. Thirdly, communication theories will be presented and analysed in what way the applied communication tools and mechanisms encouraged inclusion of the local and national actors in the cluster process.

The second part consists of the methodology which describes the theoretical framework and the approach taken to analyse the evaluation reports with respect to communication tools and mechanisms relevant for the cluster process and the inclusion of local and national organizations.

In the third part these findings will be compared to Yemen, in order to investigate to what extent the results found in the evaluation concerning the position of local and national actors,
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and the communication mechanisms that existed between the international actors and the local and national organisations in these six countries apply to Yemen. In the final chapter the conclusion and recommendations will be presented that may be relevant to the policy of the cluster approach.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
In this chapter a thorough explanation will be given of the cluster approach and how it functions. First a description will be given of the concept of the cluster approach. To get a full understanding of the rationale of this approach a brief historical background will be outlined to explain the reasons for creating this coordination tool; there is an increasing awareness in the international community to address the gaps in the humanitarian response. Then an overview will be presented of the organisations involved in the clusters and how the clusters are organised at different levels; also the newly created funding mechanisms will be mentioned necessary to support timely emergency response with adequate financial means. Finally, the position of local and national organisations in the coordination process is described, using communication theory to explain the communication mechanisms in the clusters between local/national and international organisations.

2.2 The Cluster Approach
Introduced in 2005, the cluster approach is a system of coordination of humanitarian response, in which a lead organisation, allocated to a cluster or sector, is responsible for organising coordination at global and country level, strengthening global preparedness, developing global guidance and acting as provider of last resort. This means that it is the responsibility of the sector lead to “ensure an adequate and appropriate response” (IASC), where gaps arise in the response. The sectors or clusters provide a framework for humanitarian actors to respond jointly to needs that have been commonly identified, to develop strategies with shared objectives and to coordinate the humanitarian response effectively. The aim of each sector or cluster is to share information and cooperate as well as possible with all parties in a conflict situation and to facilitate coordination of activities of the various humanitarian actors within the sector. (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2).

The overall purpose of the cluster approach is to manage and coordinate the humanitarian response in such a way that a) assistance can be given in a more timely and effective manner, b) that there is a sector coordination leader with clearly defined responsibilities that can be held accountable for the coordination activities c) that partnerships between UN, international actors and local NGOs and national authorities is strengthened and d) that there is prioritisation of activities at the field level to avoid gaps and duplication. (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2)
The cluster approach exists at two levels; the global level and the country level. At the global level its aim is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to be able to respond to humanitarian emergencies and it serves as a support to the clusters at the country level. At the same time at the country level its aim is to directly strengthen the humanitarian response to those affected by crises, by ensuring that there is a high level of predictability, accountability and partnership in the areas of activity and also that available resources are better prioritised by means of better labour division among the humanitarian organisations. (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 3)

In the following paragraph will be explained why this system of coordination was created.

2.2.1 Background and reasons for implementation of the cluster approach.
Throughout the 1990s until today, the international community had gradually become more aware of its failures to provide assistance and protection in an effective way to those affected by humanitarian crises. Especially after the Rwanda crisis in 1994, there have been many debates, discussions and publications on the quality of humanitarian assistance. (Hilhorst 359) The inability of the international community to respond appropriately and effectively to the crisis in Darfur in 2004 triggered UN Emergency Response Coordinator Jan Egeland, in close coordination with the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC)⁴ to commission a review of the humanitarian system.⁵

On the basis of the Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) report a humanitarian reform was initiated in 2005 aimed at strengthening the humanitarian response to emergencies all over the world. In the report factors were indicated that hindered a speedy and effective humanitarian response. The following recommendations were made:

- a global vision and shared plan of action should be developed for the improvement of the humanitarian system
- promote accountability, particularly to those in need

⁴The Inter Agency Standing Committee, established in 1992, is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance, chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who is appointed by the Secretary General of the UN. In the committee the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners are involved. (IASC)
⁵Definition by Borton (2009); “...the humanitarian system comprises a multiplicity of international, national and locally-based organisations deploying financial, material and human resources to provide assistance and protection to those affected by conflict and natural disasters with the objective of saving lives, reducing suffering and aiding recovery.”
- improve preparedness system-wide matched to appropriate political and financial support at the international level

- improve collaboration within and between the UN system, Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGOs

- lead organization concept needs to be adopted system-wide; before the humanitarian reform only a limited number of sectors had designated lead agencies (e.g. FAO for the food sector) accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HR)

### 2.2.2 Cluster Approach Organisation

In this section is explained how the cluster coordination fits in the Humanitarian Reform process and how it functions.

The Cluster Approach is an important part of the Humanitarian Reform Process, which is built on four pillars: first, the cluster approach, which is explained in the previous chapter; second, improved humanitarian financing by establishing the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) which enables aid organizations to react promptly to new or rapidly deteriorating crises by providing emergency funds and to strengthen core elements of humanitarian response that are underfunded; third, strengthening the role and capacity of the Humanitarian Coordinator, who leads the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). The Humanitarian Country Team is at the heart of the new coordination structure, bringing together all the organisations that are necessary to the emergency response; fourth, promoting partnership among the various actors to enhance the effectiveness of the coordination mechanism. Partnership is based on the principles of Equality, Transparency, Results-oriented approach, Responsibility and Complementarity. This last pillar had initially not been a part of the humanitarian reform and was added in 2007 when the Principles of Partnership were adopted by the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP). The GHP, which brings together UN and non-UN organizations “on an equal footing” addresses issues of how humanitarian actors work together. (The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 4) Apart from applying Principles of Partnership, humanitarian actors will be guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

In May 2010, the cluster approach was introduced in 27 of the 28 countries that had a Humanitarian Coordinator. (The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 3)

Clusters were introduced for nine areas of response and two service areas, that are all led by a
UN cluster lead and sometimes assisted by a non-UN co-lead. More often an international NGO functions as a co-lead. At the global level, cluster leads get together with interested parties to develop surge capacities, stocks, technical guidance, training, tools and operational support. At the national, or provincial level then, a lead organization is appointed that organizes daily, weekly, or monthly meetings, depending on the intensity of the emergency. In these cluster meetings strategies are discussed, information shared, mutual feedback given among cluster members, and preparations made for the main funding appeals like the Common Appeals Process (CAP). (Steets et al., 25) The main differences with the sector-based coordination systems before the Humanitarian Reform is the designation of a global lead organization, the creation of a global coordination forum and the responsibility of lead organizations to act as “providers of last resort”

The service clusters differ from the response clusters in that they provide services to other humanitarian organizations instead of to the affected population.

In the overview below all the clusters and their corresponding cluster leads are given.

Fig. 1: Clusters and cluster leads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters for Response Areas</th>
<th>Lead organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>FAO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCM (Camp Management)</td>
<td>UNHCR/IOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Recovery</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>UNICEF/IFRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>WHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASH (Water and Sanitation)</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters for Service Areas</th>
<th>Lead organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>OCHA/WFP/UNICEF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The cluster leads are all UN agencies, apart from IFRC and IOM.

Besides the coordination of response within a cluster, inter-cluster coordination is essential to ensure that there is a cross-sectoral humanitarian response plan, that resources are appropriately prioritised across the clusters and that cross-cutting issues like gender, HIV/AIDS, age and environment are properly addressed. Moreover, it must ensure that inter-cluster duplications and gaps are eliminated. At the operational level usually an inter-cluster coordinating forum is established that brings together the Cluster Coordinators as representatives of their cluster. Together they give recommendations on policies or strategies of the Humanitarian Country Team, ensure that needs assessments are well coordinated and that all the organizations in the clusters are provided with the same data about a problem area. They feed back their operational priorities and challenges to the HCT. The forum is chaired by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

In the figure below is illustrated what the responsibilities of the clusters are at the global level, and for the country level, at national and local level.

*Fig. 2: The different levels of the Cluster Approach*
At country level the way the cluster approach is implemented varies significantly. According to the evaluation report on the effectiveness of the cluster approach, published in April 2010, this depends on the type of emergency, the geographic coverage, the thematic areas that are needed, specific challenges per country, the integration of the cluster approach in existing coordinating mechanisms, use of cluster specific terminology. (Steets et al. 27) This flexibility may be a strength, but in the strength also lies its weakness; although a framework exists, there is a great lack of clarity around the details of the cluster approach, which may generate many different interpretations. (ICVA, n.p.)

The introduction of the cluster approach is a new step in strengthening existing coordinating mechanisms at global, national and local level in order to improve timeliness, predictability, effectiveness and cooperation among actors to prevent duplication and gaps in the emergency response. It is an ambitious enterprise, because it involves an organizational change process, which requires a large financial investment up-front, the results of which can only be seen after a few years. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that the cluster approach, and the Humanitarian Reform are driven by an international perspective focusing on international systems of response. This is not surprising: the humanitarian reform is a UN initiative and the cluster leads are UN organizations and sometimes INGOs act as co-leads. The role played by the local and national organizations and the degree of their involvement in this international system of response may be influenced by the communication mechanisms that exist between international organizations vis-à-vis the national and local organizations. This will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

2.3 The Role of Local and National Actors in the Cluster Process

In this section will first be explained what the designated role is of local and national actors in the cluster process. Then the communication mechanisms will be described that exist between the international versus national and local actors.

The Humanitarian Reform was set up by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a UN body consisting of the main international humanitarian organizations, consisting of three
“families”; the UN organizations, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGOs. The IASC established guidelines determining how the Reform Process had to be executed. Since one of the main objectives of the cluster approach was to strengthen leadership in the coordination of the emergency response, clear guidelines were set up for the sector lead at both global and country level. The IASC considered it a “key responsibility” of the sector leads to ensure that response is built on local capacities and that they cooperate with the government and local organizations. However, the degree of governmental and local engagement in humanitarian activities should depend on the situation in each country and “on the willingness and capacities of each of these actors to lead or participate in humanitarian activities” (IASC, 9) as well as the political and security situation in on-going conflicts. All in all, the IASC emphasizes promoting involvement of national and local organisations in the cluster process by the lead organisation of the cluster.

The introduction of the Principles of Partnership in 2007 aimed at improving cooperation between all humanitarian actors (i.e. including local and national NGOs) on a basis of equality, transparency, results-oriented, complementarity and responsibility. These concepts are explained as follows in the document; equality refers to mutual respect that members of the Global Humanitarian Platform have for each other, irrespective of size and power; transparency, which includes financial transparency, can be achieved when organisations consult each other and share information at an early stage, and thus create trust; being results-oriented requires coordination to focus on effective humanitarian response making use of capabilities and operational capacities of organisations; complementarity refers to the opportunity of organizations to complement each other due to the diversity of the humanitarian community. Local capacity is seen as an asset which must be enhanced and on which must be built, whereby language and culture barriers should be overcome. To ensure cooperation between all humanitarian organisations, therefore, these Principles must be incorporated in the way of working within and between the clusters. (Principles of Partnership, n.p.)

When introducing the cluster approach, IASC commissioned a team of researchers to evaluate the functioning of the cluster approach in two phases. Firstly, in 2007, an evaluation, Phase I, was conducted in four countries (Chad, DRC, Somalia and Uganda) to assess the process of implementation of the cluster approach. Regarding the involvement of national and local NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) it was found that the cluster approach was not of added value to engaging more local organizations in the cluster process.
Even in sudden-onset crises, cluster coordinators were not engaging with local organisations, in spite of these organisations being active and capable in a number of instances. In fact, the local organisations were functioning the same way as before the introduction of the cluster approach. (Stoddard et al. 16)

In between the two IASC evaluations, mapping studies were conducted in 2008 that looked at Humanitarian Reform in five countries; Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe. These studies were commissioned by a consortium of six NGOs - ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children, together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) as part of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. This Project was set up to strengthen engagement of local, national and international NGOs, because many NGOs felt that the UN-led reform was too limited in focus, ignoring both accountability to affected populations and the role of local and national actors. Also these mapping studies have found that it was very difficult for local and national NGOs to access funds and to meaningfully participate in the cluster process. (Street et al. 4)

As Anne Street put it:

“it is a fundamental fact that the reform process was driven by an international perspective which focused on international systems of humanitarian response, without sufficiently considering the implications of the proposed changes for national, local government structures, or the roles of national civil society actors and NGOs” (3)

In other words, it is a top-down process in which the part played by national and local organisations was given little consideration.

Secondly, in 2009, the Phase Two evaluation Cluster Approach, commissioned by the IASC was held in six countries; Haïti, Chad, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), Uganda, Myanmar, DRC. The focus of this evaluation was on the outcomes generated by the cluster approach from the perspective of the country-level. One of the key indicators in the evaluation referred to the degree in which the cluster approach had strengthened the humanitarian response in terms of ownership and connectedness, where ownership refers to the role of national and local authorities and civil society organizations in the coordination and provision of humanitarian response. (Steets et al. 60) Also in this evaluation, the findings concerning the involvement of local and national actors in the cluster approach were disappointing; clusters seem to largely exclude local and national organisations and do not build on already existing
coordination and response mechanisms; the introduction of the cluster approach in some cases seem to have weakened local and national ownership and capacities. The reasons that were given for the marginal participation of local and national organisations are the use of the English or French language used in the meetings instead of the local language; use of internet, which local organisations often do not have, to share information; transport problems for local organisations that work in the field; lack of staff time for local organisations to attend the meeting; lack of motivation by local organisations to attend meetings, that focused on funding processes, because local NGOs receive only a small percentage of the funding. (Steets et al. 62)

In conclusion can be said that, according to the IASC guidelines, building on local capacity is a key responsibility for the sector lead of the cluster. Moreover, one of the objectives of the cluster approach comprised strengthening ownership in the humanitarian response. In the Principles of Partnership endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, equality between organisations, transparency in communication and finance, building on local capacity and recognition of each other’s strength to complement each other in the humanitarian response, are presented as prerequisites for optimal cooperation between all humanitarian organisations, including local and national ones.

In the next section will be attempted to explain more in depth how the local and national organisations are positioned in the cluster process and what mechanisms play a role that could account for their position.

2.4 Communication Mechanisms
When trying to describe the position of the local organisations in the coordination process, I will make use of communication theory to explain the processes taking place in the clusters among the international, national and local actors. Since these are complex processes various angles will be taken to attempt to understand the position of local organisations vis-à-vis the international organisations in the cluster coordination process.

If an organisation is considered “any structured group of people brought together to achieve certain goals that the individuals alone cannot achieve” (Hellriegel, Slocum 7), one could regard a cluster as an organisation, in that it is a group of people in organisations that are brought together to achieve effective humanitarian response by means of a coordinating mechanism; the cluster system is headed by a global cluster lead that supports the national cluster lead; the national cluster lead is responsible for strategic planning, mobilising (
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financial) resources, strategic planning, inter-cluster coordination, linking with national authorities; at the local level the implementation of the humanitarian response takes place (see fig.1) So the cluster system can be seen as a structure of units, in this case the organisations, that are dependent on each other because of the tasks they have to perform. Coordination is the alignment of these tasks. (Groenewegen) An important instrument for effective coordination is information gathering and sharing. This is done by means of communication. Meyers and Meyers (1985) defined communication in an organisation as “the central binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organized behavior” (xv)

Effective communication is critical in the cluster approach, because it can help all the organisations in the cluster process to achieve that aid to the affected population is given in a timely manner, without duplication and gaps in the response, taking into account the Principles of Partnership. It can help to achieve that those giving aid are more involved in the process and that the reputation of humanitarian organisations improves. Once this has been achieved, communication may be called effective, i.e. it has achieved a desired result.

Clusters are inherently multicultural, pluralist organisations, which makes cluster coordination quite complex. The challenges that may impede effective communication include the great number of humanitarian organisations, cultural diversity, different levels of coordination, type and phase of emergency, geographic coverage, political, financial and time pressures. (Blundel, 2)

To be able to understand what makes communication in an organisation effective, we firstly need to know what the communication process looks like and secondly, what effective communication entails.

*Fig.3*

Source: Google Images
As is illustrated in figure 1, the communication process starts when a message is formulated in the sender’s brain, i.e. the source. The message is then encoded e.g. when the message is converted into a series of words. The encoded message is then transmitted to the other person, the receiver, who receives the message and decodes and interprets it. The exchanges between sender and receiver can be distorted by “noise” a term which includes everything that either distorts or interrupts an encoded message so that it fails to get across to the receiver in its original form. Then the receiver responds to the message and this is called feedback. Human feedback is irregular and unpredictable, because each person reacts to a message in a different way, depending on how the message has been perceived. The interpretation or decoding of the message is shaped or influenced by a person’s subjective perception of the world and their pre-existing values and experiences. The irregular and unpredictable response of people to messages may get in the way of mutual understanding. (Blundel, 9)

Organisational communication consists of a great amount of different kinds of messages the contents of which can be broken down into various elements, like factual information, opinions, beliefs, emotions. These messages are sent through different communication channels like face-to-face meetings, conversations, reports, e-mails, brochures, letters, telephone calls. One way of looking at different types of communication in an organisation is shown in the figure below representing all the dimensions of communication.

Fig.4 The Dimensions of Communication

Adapted from Blundel, 2004
The dimensions should not be seen as separate slots, but are overlapping. Verbal communication deals with messages encoded in words, both spoken and written forms. Non-verbal communication refers to “any way in which we communicate our ideas, opinions and feelings with each other that do not involve using written or spoken words.” (Blundel 87) This means that there are many forms of non-verbal communication, including body-language (human posture, eye-contact, gestures), visual messages, but also sounds and smell (Blundel 10).

One-way and interactive or two way communication refers to the direction in which the message is travelling. Face-to-face meetings or interviews are examples of interactive communication. Inter-personal communication occurs when individuals interact directly in relatively small groups such as meetings. Mass communication refers to sending messages to large numbers of people, through the use of for example computer technology. Internal communication takes place within an organization whereas external communication involves organizations and audiences outside the boundaries of the organizations. More and more, however, internal and external communication processes are integrated (Blundel, 11).

There are various theoretical perspectives on organisational communication. Since attention will be paid in this study to how individuals and groups of people communicate with each other and how this shapes their behavior a few perspectives will be briefly dealt with that illustrate how communication in human organisations may be approached.

The modernist perspective deals with how predictions can be made about communication in organisations by using research models based on natural science and quantitative data to make a detailed analysis of the organization. (Thompson, Pugh and Hickson in Blundel 13)

Parallels can be drawn with the positivist approach in research. In systems theory, more attention has been paid to subjective perceptions in organisations, whereby feedback may be used as input for organisational learning (Weick). In interpretive theory it is recognised that communication is about meanings constructed by the receiver as well as about the performance of the sender. From this viewpoint qualitative research methods are used like participatory observations. The focus is on the context in which the interaction takes place. This is more or less similar to social constructivism as mentioned in the data analysis of this study. According to Baker (3) the contextual approach focuses on the larger context of communication, both non-verbal and verbal, and looks at the relational context between the sender and receiver within the larger social cultural context. Critical theory in organisational communication is concerned with how communication channels are used to exercise power over employees or stakeholders. Critical researchers deal with the use and abuse of power in
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organisations for example by using language as an instrument to overcome resistance to change and how discourses in organisations can become dominant to block out minority views. (Habermas in Blundel, 14)

In his book Pragmatics of Human Communication, Watzlawick posits that communication affects behaviour and that all behaviour is communication. Since all behaviour in an interactional situation has message value,” be it action or inaction, words or silence”, it influences others and these others cannot not respond and thus are communicating as well. It follows that one cannot not communicate. Communication not only conveys information but at the same time it imposes behavior. This he calls the report and command aspect of human communication. The report aspect of a message deals with the content of the message while the command aspect refers to what sort of message it is to be taken as and therefore refers to the relationship between the communicators. (Watzlawick 32) The way a message is formulated verbally, for example, depends on the relationship between the communicators; parents talk in a different way to their children than they do at work with their colleagues. This approach to communication is relevant in the context of the coordination process in the clusters, since coordination can be regarded as multilayered “involving the orchestration of relationships” (Minear, 20) The cluster consists of many different individuals and organisations, bringing with them “significantly different perspectives, based on different histories, cultures, goals. These different perspectives have to be integrated and accommodated if effective action is to be taken by all the relevant agents” (Chapman n.p.).

2.4.1 Barriers to communication

As was illustrated in the communication process figure, the sending of a message may be disrupted by noise, the source of which may become a barrier to communication. To overcome these barriers it is important to gain an understanding of the underlying causes. Blundel (28) gives an overview of causes of common barriers to communication that seem apparent but a more complex explanation is needed to understand why communication in a certain situation failed. Communication theories as mentioned in the previous chapter may help in analyzing these complex causes.

Some barriers that are mentioned are physiological barriers referring to limitations of the human body and mind; our ability to communicate with one another is influenced by three interrelated mechanisms: 1. alertness and attention, that refer to how our senses manage to
pick up information; 2. perception, which means that the same information is interpreted differently. A classical example is the picture of the old woman which can be seen as a young lady, depending on how the picture is perceived (see appendix 1); 3. memory, consisting of a sensory memory, short term (working memory) and long term memory. The capacity of the sensory memory is limited, causing an overload of information to be partly lost and partly stored in the short and long term memory. In this process messages or stimuli appear to be filtered as well. So when communicating a message that needs to be retained longer than a few seconds, which is the time limit of the sensory memory, it may be important to think about how the message should be sent to ensure it to be stored in the short and long term memory of the receiver.

In the cluster system, communication between individuals and groups is influenced by the social and cultural setting in which the cluster operates. A cluster may be regarded as a multicultural, pluralist organisation, because it consists of people from many different national, social and economic backgrounds, bringing their own values, norms, beliefs and assumptions. These values and norms are often not visible; it is these invisible aspects of culture that cause misunderstandings and thus may limit the capacity of people from different cultures to communicate. Being the most prominent feature of culture, language is an important barrier to effective communication. In interpersonal communication, especially verbal language, like the use of jargon or poor pronunciation, can be a major source of misunderstanding as well as misinterpreting non-verbal cues. Another barrier to effective communication is stereotyping. A stereotype is a categorization of a different social or cultural group on the basis of (often) false assumptions. These preconceptions are sometimes developed to degrade others as a way of strengthening one’s own self-image. (Wei, n.p) Stereotyping may inhibit the development of trust and cultivate divisions. (De Vita, 169)

In organisational research, trust was first seen as a prerequisite for organisational effectiveness. Later researchers found that interpersonal trust has a positive effect on performance and involvement of employees; it was found that communication plays an important role in maintaining trust. (Thomas et al. 288) Also Stephenson concluded that, to increase cooperation between humanitarian organisations, organisations themselves should develop organisational cultures that encourage inter-organisational trust and more effective cooperation. (14) In inter-organisational relationships it has been widely acknowledged by scholars that “trust can lead to cooperative behavior among individuals, groups and organizations.”( Jones and George 531) In the context of the cluster approach, in order to
achieve effective coordination, relationship building is crucial. A cluster was found to be successful, because it had built on pre-existing relationships based on mutual trust. (Streets n.p.) Therefore, it is relevant to find out in what way communication may be used to create and maintain trust.

In a research by Thomas, Zolin and Hartman, a connection appeared to exist between building trust and communication. They argue that “trust is based on beliefs about the other party which are shaped through information. Consequently, providing information gives (the other party) the opportunity to develop trust, and lack of information can reduce trust.” (290) The two aspects of information sharing mentioned in their research are the quality and the quantity of information. One of the conclusions of this research was, that the quality of information determines to what extent a partner or actor is more likely to rely on the other actor who shared the information. The quality of information refers to accuracy, timeliness and usefulness of the information. As to the quantity of information, this was insignificant for creating trust for employees or co-workers but was more applicable to the (top) management level. When there is mutual trust, it is suggested, there will be more openness in the organisation. This openness, then, makes members of the organisation feel more involved. (303) In other words, poor quality of information decreases interpersonal and inter-organisational trust. Applying this to the functioning of the cluster approach, one may say that the quality of information has an effect on the involvement of actors in the cluster process including local and national actors.

2.4.2 Overcoming the barriers
Having presented a few barriers to effective communication, the question now is how these can be overcome, so that the message comes across to the receiver as the sender has intended it. Blundel gives suggestions on how to overcome these barriers. Firstly, the receiver must be taken seriously, by which is meant that it is important to know the receiver’s pre-existing attitude, their expectation and degree of involvement. Secondly, the message must be prepared before it is delivered. In the cluster meetings, for example, it is crucial that the message due to its complex nature and its diverse audience is well thought out. Thirdly, the message must be delivered skillfully by focusing on the receiver and by using multiple communication channels. This may reinforce the message and may be very useful when engaging with a diverse audience. Ensuring feedback is important to allow the sender to make adjustments to the content and format of the message. (50) An example of the relevance of giving appropriate feedback was also mentioned in the Summary Report on the cluster
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approach; it was stated that only requesting information from NGOs without giving them feedback on what was done with it, impacts on their involvement (n.p.). The fourth suggestion is based on the research into the quality and quantity of information; information must be accurate, timely and useful (relevant) in order to create trust in interpersonal and (inter)organisational communication. This has a positive effect on the involvement of actors.

Having presented some barriers to effective communication and some suggestions how to overcome them, we will now turn to exploring what barriers exist in the communication between the international actors and the national actors and local actors in the cluster process.

2.5 Role of communication in the cluster
The way cluster coordination is organised, determines the communication structure within and between clusters. As was mentioned previously, cluster coordination occurs at two levels; the global and the country level. At the global level cluster lead organisations, mostly UN organisations, develop surge capacities, technical support, training etc. together with other interested organisations to support the clusters at country level. These have been designated by the IASC. In cases of complex emergencies a Humanitarian Coordinator is appointed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) who is appointed by the UN Secretary General. The Humanitarian Coordinator is responsible for coordination and leadership of the humanitarian response. The HC chairs the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) consisting of those humanitarian organisations that participate in the response (UN organizations, IOM, International and national NGOs).

At the country level the country cluster lead is appointed by the Humanitarian Coordinator in consultation with the HCT. One of the responsibilities of the cluster lead is to develop and maintain links with government and local authorities. According to the IASC guidelines, the clusters are responsible for information management within the clusters; they have to generate up-to-date cluster specific information, like meeting minutes, standard forms and share these with cluster members. Furthermore, there is an inter-cluster coordination forum, chaired by UNOCHA, responsible for sharing information between the clusters. This forum brings together the cluster coordinators and co-leads (often INGOs) who directly liaise with the Humanitarian Country Team. UNOCHA is responsible for contact directories of humanitarian partners, agendas and minutes of coordination meetings with the HC, the Who does What Where database, inventory of relevant documents on the humanitarian situation, etc. As was mentioned earlier in this study, local NGOs do not play a role in coordination bodies in the
cluster. This is again illustrated by the figure below which represents the organisation structure and communication lines between those responsible for the coordination process.

*Fig. 5: Communication Structure at Country level*

Engaging in the clusters is open to all humanitarian organisations provided that they show a willingness to share information, attend meetings, contribute to the database of Who does What Where, engage in coordinated needs assessments, response delivery, planning resources. Moreover, they must have a realistic perception of the relevance of their organisation to the emergency response, and possess organisational capacity and technical expertise. (Humanitarian Reform 2) Interesting to note is that “it is up to individual agencies to determine level of participation in the work of the different clusters. Cluster approach itself does not require that humanitarian actors be held accountable to sector leads.” (IASC 10) This implies that the cluster approach is not a hierarchical structure.

The communication structure of an organisation determines if an organisation is operating effectively. The structure explained above, illustrates how communication between the various actors and groups is formalised. However, the nature of emergency response requires a great deal of flexibility and following the formal communication channels is not always possible. Also, clusters may consist of a large number of NGOs - the health cluster in Haïti, for example, consisted of 400 health NGOs (Merlin) - and communication involving many people and organisations will never lead to an intensive exchange of information with all of them. Therefore, effective exchange of information can only be done within a selected group of people. In this way networks are created. Networks may be regarded as informal communicative relations. Factors that were found to help create these networks were
similarity between people - people tend to have stronger ties with people who are similar to themselves- and physical distance; the closer people are the easier it is to share information. (Groenewegen) It was found that social contact between colleagues took place regularly within a distance of 30 meters (Allen and Henn in Groenewegen) Although this research dealt with communication within a building, it is relevant to get an understanding of the importance of distance in communication. The structure of the network is an important determinant of how, firstly, information can be shared and disseminated efficiently. Secondly, it determines how decisions can be taken efficiently based on the input of the actors in a network. (Groenewegen)

Before the introduction of the humanitarian reform and the cluster approach, the concept of networks in humanitarian aid operations had been widely researched. In one research it was argued that the more central an organization in the inter-organizational network, the better it could oversee the flow of information or coordinate relief activities. Centrality in this case was measured by means of number of beneficiaries served. It was found that international NGOs were more central to and also more visible in the aid network, suggesting that local organisations “remained peripheral to national –level coordination efforts”. (S. Moore et al. 315) From this may be inferred that when a person or organisation is less central in the network, it may influence their access to information. However, those who are central in the network may have problems transmitting all the information, whereby communication flows may be congested. (Groenewegen).

The stakeholder map below was made by the evaluators for the evaluation of the cluster approach in 2009. By means of this stakeholder map they showed whom they were going to interview or send a survey to. It is a basic map, because the cluster approach is flexible to the extent that its structure and organization may be adapted to the situation, the nature of the disaster, the political situation etc. It is presented here to illustrate the structure of the cluster approach: in the center of the circle and in the operator square, the UN organisations and international NGOs are located. They take strategic decisions and are responsible for management and leadership and coordination of the cluster. Some organisations or governments are outside the circle, because not all INGOs participate in the cluster (like ICRC) and in some cases of violent conflicts there is no government presence in the cluster approach. It can be seen that local authorities and local NGOs are positioned on the periphery of the circle. This suggest that they are marginally involved in the coordination mechanism.
At a workshop on the functioning of the clusters in Nairobi in 2008 (Summary Report), it was concluded that the key to involving all humanitarian partners was the use of “operational conversation”, meaning a two-way sharing of information with humanitarian partners, which is seen as crucial to a positive atmosphere. The term “operational conversation” looks very similar to the concept of relational coordination (Gittel in Groenewegen) which means that people who work together in stressful circumstances should discuss what they are doing during their operational activities, because cooperation will be more successful (22).

In processes of cooperation the attitude of people towards one and other is very important. This is especially relevant in the multicultural, pluralist environment of the cluster. Attitude
influences one’s behavior towards others. From Watzlawick’s perspective, all behavior is communication and therefore all behavior has message value. Apart from the explicit content of the message, there is also the aspect of interpretation and reading between the lines, the so-called command aspect of a message, which refers to the relationship between the communicators.

In the context of humanitarian aid, partnership and the cluster approach, the attitude of UN and INGOs towards the local NGOs and national partners is discussed in many articles. Ian Smillie argues that international organisations still determine who gets the money, they make the decisions. The local organisations are relegated to the side lines or “used as errand boys.” Although the international organisations realise they need to partner with local organisations, they seem to “have great difficulties in working effectively with local organisations. And when they did the relationship was more often one of patronage than partnership”(2)

Moreover, INGOs “lack serious understanding of the difference between the prevailing world view they bring to an emergency and those prevailing among the country they seek to assist” (8) Anne Street mentions relegation of national and local NGOs to the role of implementing partner, effectively excluding them from the cluster and other coordinating mechanisms, even though local organisations are often better placed to design and develop programmes as well. Sidelining of local organizations is also reflected in access to funding. The size of grants for national NGOs is much smaller than those for INGOs, because sometimes the international organizations consider local and national organizations incapable of implementing projects with pooled funds. However, no funds are earmarked for capacity building (n.p.), implying that nothing is done to make these organisations capable. In the Summary Note of ICVA it was suggested that international organisations should change their viewpoint, since they come in and impose their own system of coordination and impose a language barrier. This results in local organisation’s reluctance to get engaged in this “foreign system” and rather do their own things. (ICVA Secretariat n.p.)

At a conference held in Bangkok on 2010 on “Language and MDG”, James Sheperd-Barron, a senior humanitarian worker, posited that “lack of language skills is one of the prime determinants of poor coordination”. Besides language skills, he mentions the use of jargon by the international organisations, labeled by him as “Aid Speak”, and “incomprehensible acronyms”. In an article in the Economist of 27 January 2010, “Aid Speak” is called ”NGO speak”. Examples of most favourite words used by the international NGOs are: “empowerment”, “capacity-building”, “stakeholder”, followed by “governance”, “civil
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society”, “facilitator “and “disadvantaged”. British NGOs seem to have a preference for “focal groups”, while American “like anything that leads to’ inclusion’ especially of the ‘excluded “. Using these terms stands in the way of effective communication and mutual understanding, because they “are hard to define and harder still to contradict”. In the context of funding applications using the right word is a powerful instrument. “ If you do not know the buzzword, “says an NGO director, “ you hardly have a chance to apply for funds” ( The Economist)

Conclusion

In this chapter an overview is given of the organisation and the purpose of the cluster approach. The cluster approach was created as part of the Humanitarian Reform, as a tool for coordination of all areas of humanitarian response at the global and country level. Its purpose is to manage and coordinate the humanitarian response in a more timely and effective manner; to make a sector coordination leader responsible and accountable for the coordination activities; to strengthen partnerships between UN, international actors and local NGOs and national authorities and to avoid gaps and duplication by prioritising activities at the field level. Sector leads are always international or UN organisations.

The IASC emphasises promoting involvement of national and local organisations in the cluster process by the lead organisation of the cluster and building on local capacity is a key responsibility for the sector lead of the cluster. Moreover, one of the objectives of the cluster approach comprised strengthening ownership in the humanitarian response.

By looking at communication theory, comments can be made on the effect of communication mechanisms on the degree of involvement of local and national organisations in the cluster process. Considering clusters multicultural, pluralist organisations, it was found in the literature that effective organisational communication is determined both by the communication structure and the quality of communication between people or groups. The cluster approach is seen as a top-down process, driven from an international perspective. The UN and international organisations were more central to the cluster process than the national and local organisations as was illustrated in the stakeholder map and therefore had better access to information and were in a position to make decisions.

Communication refers to conveying a message as well as to the relationship between the communicators. The relationship is apparent in the attitude of international versus local/national organisations, because UN and the international organisations still determine
who gets funding and they see local and national organisations more as implementing partners than as an equal partner in the coordination process. The quality of information has an effect on the involvement of actors in the cluster process including local and national actors, because quality of information creates trust which may lead to cooperative behaviour. Therefore, in the context of the cluster approach, in order to achieve effective coordination, relationship building is crucial. Other barriers to effective communication are socio-cultural barriers (language, cultural differences), physiological (different interpretation), physical distance between communicators and attitude/behavior.

In the next chapters will be analysed what communication mechanisms had an effect on the inclusion of local and national organizations in the cluster process. Comparison will be made between results from evaluations done in several pilot countries and findings in documents on Yemen. In chapter 3 the methodology will be explained more in-depth.
Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Type of Research
This research is qualitative in character, because perceptions will be examined and reflected on in order to gain an understanding of the communication mechanisms and their effect on the involvement of local and national actors in the cluster process. (Collis Jill and Roger Hussey 13) It is based on primary and secondary data sources. Yemen was chosen as a purposive sampling method, because it is a country suffering from a protracted crisis exacerbated by political turmoil, enduring droughts and tribal wars; due to this emergency situation humanitarian intervention was needed and the cluster approach was rolled out in Yemen at the end of 2009. Three concepts were researched by means of document analysis and the links between these concepts were established and analysed. They are the concept of the cluster approach, the degree of inclusion of the local and national actors in the cluster coordination process, and the effect of communication by the international actors on the position in the cluster of the local and national organizations. The information gathered about these three topics was applied to Yemen and described to what extent local and national actors are included in the cluster coordination process.

3.2. Research Design
3.2.1 Data Collection
For the data collection of the cluster approach and the position of local and national actors in this process, I based myself on both primary and secondary data, found in various types of documentation, like evaluations, websites, conference reports, research journals and books. The data from the primary sources were gathered mainly by means of qualitative methods, like interviews, field visits, surveys, document review. The first evaluation conducted in 2007 was informed by analysis of four pilot countries that were chosen on the basis of current status (whether the cluster approach was new or ongoing), past studies and feasibility of field visit. The information from the second evaluation of 2009 was specifically used to create a better understanding of the cluster coordination process and the degree of inclusion of local and national NGOs in this process in the six countries that were evaluated. The countries that were chosen as case study covered different types of emergencies and different stages of implementation of the cluster approach. All the relevant stakeholders at local level and global level in the country studies were included in the analysis as well as those organisations that participated in the cluster process and those that did not.
For Yemen information was gathered from minutes published by various clusters in Yemen and analysis of communication mechanisms as indicated in the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan of 2010, a Real-Time Evaluation⁶ by UNICEF and in the Mid Year Review 2011. Although many of the documents used are written by international western NGOs or UN organisations, further documents were found that represent the Yemenite point of view, for example the Humanitarian Forum Yemen, so as to ensure creating a more complete picture of the situation in Yemen. This will be relevant when researching the position of local and national actors in the clusters in Yemen. Other documents used are agendas, announcements and the minutes of cluster meetings.

3.2.2 Data analysis
Communication mechanism is a very broad term and it needs to be closely defined to make it workable within the scope of this study. Since the purpose of this study is to gain understanding of the inclusion of local and national organisations in the cluster approach through validation of the communication processes applied in the cluster coordination, the approach taken for data analysis will be leaning towards social constructionism, also known as social constructivism. Its main idea, as developed by Berger, Luckman, Watzlawick and Shotter (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Lowe 29) is that ‘reality’ is socially constructed and given meaning by people - as opposed to the positivist point of view which states that properties of ‘reality’ or social world should be measured through objective methods, based on facts; it is also referred to as interpretive methods by Habermas (in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Lowe 30), because attention will be paid to how people individually or as a group communicate with each other and how this may influence their behavior. Analysis of the communication tools were interpreted from this point of view. In the case of Yemen also stakeholder mapping was used as a tool to represent the relationships between the humanitarian actors and their position in the coordination process.

3.2.3 Reliability
The reliability and quality of the documents used in this study were taken into consideration by assessing its purpose, the audience it was written for and thoroughness of methodology. Since various methods of qualitative research were used in the evaluations, like interviews, field study and surveys, access was gained to the experiences of the people who were the objects of the evaluations. It has also been clarified how the data were analysed, what

⁶“A real-time evaluation (RTE) is an evaluation in which the primary objective is to provide feedback in a participatory way in real time (i.e. during the evaluation fieldwork) to those executing and managing the humanitarian response” (Cosgrave et al. 9)
impediments the researchers were confronted with and how that may have influenced the outcome.

3.2.4 Limitations
Since the cluster approach is a fairly new instrument in the coordination of humanitarian response in Yemen, no thorough evaluation of its functioning in Yemen in general and of inclusion of local and national actors in particular has been done. This means there is a lack of detailed information and therefore the outcome of the research on Yemen may have a tentative character, based on results of two evaluations and one mapping study. The information that is available on the clusters in Yemen also differs per cluster in quantity and quality, so that it will be difficult to obtain an overall result applicable to every cluster. Furthermore, while Yemen’s comprehensive security is very poor due to the protracted crisis it is confronted with, it was impossible to get access to representatives of either local or international organisations.
Chapter 4 Document Analysis: Evaluation reports

4.1 Introduction
In this chapter we will have a closer look at the findings in the evaluation reports, focusing on the question: What has been the actual level of proper communication tools for the benefit of including local and national actors in the coordination process of the cluster? The results of this analysis will then be compared with the situation in Yemen and the communication mechanisms that may impact on the position of local and national actors in the cluster process.

4.2 Evaluation Reports on the Cluster Approach
Two evaluations were conducted to make an assessment of the achievement of the cluster approach. The first one was held in 2007, two years after the introduction of the cluster approach. It focused on the process indicators, the achievements and limitations of the cluster approach. Fieldwork was done in four countries: Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Uganda.

Considering communication and partnership, local organisations did not see increased opportunities for partnership or funding through the cluster approach. Local organisations heard about the cluster meetings through word of mouth and did not receive a formal invitation; which made it appear that cluster coordinators did not prioritise their presence, even though local organisations were active and capable in a number of settings. Failure to translate meetings and minutes into the local language caused frustration with the local organisations and distanced them from the response. Although some local organisations cited the indirect benefits of being more visible and having network opportunities in the cluster, the evaluators could not find any tangible evidence for this. (Stoddard et al. 16)

Comparing these results with criteria for effective communication a tentative analysis may show that communication failed due to several barriers. First, by not sending the local organisations an official invitation for the cluster meeting, the cluster coordinator did not take the local partners seriously. Secondly, the socio cultural barrier hindered effective communication, because meetings and minutes were not translated into the local language. Thirdly, the quality of information was poor, because the organisations could not understand what was discussed. Poor quality of information decreases interpersonal and inter-organisational trust, which affects the involvement of local organisations negatively.
Relations between international organisations and national governments varied. In most cases governments were not closely consulted in advance about the decision to roll out a cluster. During the roll-out phase governments sometimes acted as chair or co-chair at national level. At regional or provincial level there was far less local engagement. Reasons mentioned were lack of capacity or language barriers. Relations with the government also depended on the nature of the disaster. The humanitarian response in complex emergencies is distinct from sudden-onset disasters, where the response is more often given in close cooperation with the government. (Stoddard et al. 21)

The second evaluation was conducted in 2009 and focused on the outputs and outcomes of the cluster approach at country level. It was based on studies in six countries: Haiti, Myanmar, Chad, DRC, Gaza and Uganda. In this second report, more details were given about the communication between international and local organizations. It was found that participation of the local organizations was marginal in most pilot countries. The following reasons were given: a. meetings and minutes were in English or French and not translated into the local language and full of international jargon; b. local organisations had a lack of knowledge of the existence of cluster meetings, suggesting that they may not have received an invitation; c. local organisations were often out in the field and lacked transport to attend meetings taking place in the capital; d. information was often distributed through the internet and therefore out of reach of local organisations; e. there were too few incentives for international organisations to include national and local organisations. To illustrate how meetings may be conducted the following situation is described by a participant of the survey.

“In many of the cluster meetings I attended, the facilitator had each organization present and vote publicly on proposals by each organization. Of course, all of the large organizations were immediately approved, but local organizations and other international NGOs that were not well known were immediately eliminated as recipients of funding to provide humanitarian assistance.” (Steets et al. 62)

The method of voting publicly puts local organisations at a disadvantage, because of their smaller size and limited representation in the meetings.

The presence of many of the barriers mentioned above in the relationships between international and local NGOs was confirmed by the mapping studies commissioned by the NGO and Humanitarian Reform Project and conducted in five countries: Afghanistan, DRC, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Sudan.
It was mentioned that local and national organisations had to manage their relationship with the cluster lead more carefully, if they received funding from that agency. INGOs have more power to obtain funding from these agencies, even if the relationship is not good; they are less dependent.

The same socio-cultural barriers as in the other two evaluation reports, with INGOs ignoring to use local language in meetings and minutes, was seen to be an important reason for local organisations not to attend cluster meetings. The absence of clusters outside the capital also limited local NGOs access due to transport problems and distance. Where there were clusters outside the capital, involvement of local organisations improved.

Local organisations were often left out from cluster’s capacity mapping exercises, so that their response capacity was not taken into account. Not only does this give a distorted picture of the real response capacity of the cluster, but it also totally ignores the knowledge and local experience that these organizations have.

In this mapping study it was also found that the local and national NGOs are still not well informed about the cluster approach and the benefits it may have. This is compounded by the fact that these organisations often send inexperienced staff to the meetings, who cannot really take advantage of the cluster’s benefits like using it as a forum to influence others or create opportunities for networking. (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 27) Furthermore, the number of meetings held and the amount of information was quite demanding on local organisation with limited staff.

4.2.1 Conclusion
The evaluation reports indicated that many communication barriers existed between INGOs and local NGOs in the clusters. The cause for these barriers ranged from not inviting local organisations to meetings, to ignoring local languages in meetings, and the distance of local organisations to the principal town where the meetings took place. More importantly, the methods used in the meetings to apply for funds, put local NGOs at a disadvantage. Also they were more dependent on a good relationship with the cluster lead, if they received funding through that agency. Other points mentioned by the mapping studies were ignoring local organisations in mapping capacity for response and local NGOs not being well informed of the cluster approach and its benefits.
4.3 The Cluster Approach in Yemen

4.3.1 Introduction
Until now the functioning of the cluster approach and the communication mechanisms between the international and local NGOs have been discussed based on the findings of evaluation reports, mapping studies, literature on communication theories, and opinions from humanitarian field and academic community. In order to provide a contextualised understanding of the cluster approach roll out in Yemen, it is necessary to present a brief overview of the most important factors that led to the present humanitarian crisis in Yemen. For the purpose of the explanation of the cluster approach in Yemen I will base myself on information published until mid 2011. Then the cluster approach organisation in Yemen will be explained and consecutively, the role of the local and national organisations in the cluster process and the communication mechanisms that impact on their position in the cluster process.

4.3.2 Situation Background to Yemen
Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and the least developed country on the Arabian Peninsula: it ranks 140th out of 182 countries on the UNDP Development Index.\(^7\) The poverty rate is very high; over 45% of the population live on less than $2 a day.\(^8\) The country’s development is impeded by several factors like a very low level of education, with a literacy rate of men of only 70.4% and 38.4% for women, which shows an extremely high gender disparity; Qat is widely used, for which an estimate 10-30% of household income is spent and which uses about 30% of fresh water for irrigation. Yemen is one of the most water-starved countries in the world: the internal fresh water renewable sources are far below the level of accepted water scarcity.\(^9\) Only 3% of land in Yemen is arable and a great part of that is used for the production of Qat. Some observers think that Yemen is only able to sustain a third of its present population. However, its population continues to grow at 3% a year, one of the fastest rates in the world (Oxfam 9)

Economically, Yemen is highly dependent on the production of oil. The oil production has been declining since 2003 and the World bank has estimated that oil reserves will run out between 5 to 10 years from now. The unemployment rate is very high. Yemen’s reliance on food import has left the country highly vulnerable to fluctuation in food prices on the global

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\(^7\) Human Development Report 2009
market. The global economic and financial crisis of 2008 has caused an increase of food and fuel prices. Governance is weak and there are very few basic services for the population. All these factors have resulted in a highly vulnerable population with high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. According to a global study on the gender gap, Yemeni women suffer greatly from sexual discrimination and violence against women,. This huge gender imbalance is also reflected in access to food for women; 25% of the female population between 15 and 49 years is acutely malnourished (WFP) and therefore the risk of giving birth to malnourished babies is very high. (Oxfam)

On top of these problems there is the continually increasing presence of mixed migrant flows from predominantly Somalia and Ethiopia, that places a high burden on the impoverished Yemeni population. By the end of 2011 Yemen is expected to be host to 500,000 migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (MYR 9) The Ethiopian migrants in search of work in Saudi Arabia are stopped at the border in the northwest of Yemen where an increasing numbers of irregular migrants with immediate humanitarian needs are found.

In addition to this problematic situation, Yemen is threatened by a number of crises. On the one hand, the risk of natural hazards like droughts, floods, and irregular rainfall that may result in disasters is considerable. On the other hand, due to a fragile government, Yemen has suffered from internal tribal conflicts and clashes for many years. Three main conflicts can be discerned; a separatist movement in the south, the presence of Al-Qaeda in Hadramouth in the south-east and the conflict with the al-Houthi rebels in the north. (Steets 14) (See map below)
Since 2004 there have been six rounds of conflicts in the north; the Al-Houthis are a group of radical Shiite Zaydi led by Houssein Badreddin Al-Houthi. They are based in the Northern Governorate of Sa’ada. Badreddin died in 2004 and was replaced by his brother Abdul Mallik Al-Houthi. The government of Yemen accuses the Al-Houthis of trying to impose Sharia law on the country and suspects Iran of supporting them. It has been fighting the rebels since 2004 with the help of other Zaydi and Sunni tribe. In the sixth round of conflict which escalated in August 2009 and ended in February 2010 by a cease fire, Saudi Arabia actively intervened through air strikes in support of the government, when the Al-Houthis crossed its border. (Steets and Dubai 14) This last conflict led to an estimated number of over 320,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within Sa’ada and its neighboring governorates. (YHRP)

The cluster approach was rolled out initially in support of all these IDPs in the north. The HCT ‘s overall strategy was to “provide an environment for safe and healthy living for conflict-affected people” (YHRP) The recent popular uprising and civil unrest in Northern Africa and the Middle East have had a dramatic impact on Yemen, further increasing the country’s instability. Humanitarian needs spread to other parts of the country. As a result of the political turmoil the economic situation has deteriorated. Violence in the country escalated and caused a great fuel shortage due to sabotage of oil refineries. This not only
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affected the population, but also the functioning of the humanitarian organisations in the country, who expressed concern that the delivery of aid may be jeopardised. (MYR 4) Due to the violence, access for humanitarian organizations to some areas is impossible or must be negotiated.

The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) was launched to raise funds to respond to humanitarian needs in the northern conflict, the refugee situation in the south, and the very vulnerable situation of the Yemeni population in general. (7) The YHRP is implemented through the cluster approach. Conversely, clusters can use the information in the YHRP to see what is needed and who is involved. In the next section will be elaborated on how the cluster approach is organised in Yemen.

4.3.3 Cluster approach organisation
The cluster coordination has been implemented since 2010. Nine clusters are active that hold regular meetings. They are Food and Agriculture, Protection, WASH, CCCM/Shelter, Health, Early Recovery, Nutrition, Logistics and Education. Additionally, there is a Multi Sector Group led by UNHCR, working with refugees in the south. In the figure below the Cluster process has been visualized.

Fig. 8 The Cluster Approach in Yemen

Source: YHRP 2011 (75)
The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is composed of the heads of UN Agencies and three INGOs; it is chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Meetings are held once a month. The focus of the HCT is on strategic management and decision-making.

The HCT communicate in monthly meetings with ambassadors and heads of technical donor agencies. Meetings are chaired by HC and the World Bank and its objectives are to decide on humanitarian strategies and to brief the donor community on challenges and humanitarian response in Yemen.

The Inter-cluster Coordination Meeting, chaired by OCHA, brings together cluster leads and co-leads. It is used as a platform to exchange technical information on strategies of specific clusters and advises the HCT on humanitarian action coordinated between the clusters.

Cluster meetings are organised twice a week and are chaired by the cluster lead. They are attended by cluster members and the observers (ICRC, Médecins Sans Frontières) ICRC and MSF are not cluster members, because they operate independently of the cluster process. Purpose of the meetings is to set strategies and coordinate activities at cluster level and share information on operational level. To improve communication some clusters established working groups at field level.

The INGO Forum consists of heads of INGOs. They meet monthly to share information on challenges in humanitarian and development action in Yemen. The Forum has an Emergency Response Group specially for humanitarian action.

The Local NGO Forum is composed of directors of local NGOs. It meets bi-monthly to share information and to advocate challenges in development and humanitarian action in Yemen. Both the INGO Forum and the Local NGO Forum were not found in the cluster approach in the case study countries in the evaluations mentioned in the first part of this study.

The ever increasing influx of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees arriving on Yemen’s shores after hazardous journeys, has necessitated the establishment of the Mixed Migration Task Force. It was set up to ensure a comprehensive coordinated response to the needs of these groups of people. The task force is co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM. The Danish Refugee Council is the secretariat. Task Force members are UN agencies, international and national NGOs, Yemen Red Crescent (YRCS) and the National Sub Committee for Refugees) (NASCRA). (YHRP 74)
4.4 The role of local and national actors in the cluster process in Yemen

In the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan one of the challenges mentioned that needed to be addressed was the active involvement of the government. It was said to vary too much across clusters and stronger governmental participation is needed. Although government involvement differed, it was indicated that the government itself had created an emergency coordination mechanisms working through a technical committee and later through an executive Unit of IDPs. The GoY had also established a Reconstruction Fund and had mobilized various international actors and donors to support the Joint Initiative for Sa’ada. (Steets 39) At the local level weekly coordination meetings concerning executive units for IDPs were organised by local representatives. However, in other cases it appeared that local NGOs were not sufficiently integrated in coordinating mechanisms and needed to be included more when information is shared. (YHRP 61)

The following coordination problems were mentioned in the Real-Time Evaluation (RTE) of UNICEF.

a. The purpose of the cluster approach was unclear to many humanitarian actors
b. The engagement of the government in the clusters varied strongly
c. The links between the capital and the field level are weak
d. In some areas of response there are only very few organisations active. The effectiveness of the cluster approach and of the meetings at field level is questionable.

(40)

At national level, the documents that are studied seem to agree on irregular engagement of the government depending on the cluster. The Government departments are not part of the coordination process, but liaise with cluster coordinators. (see appendix 2) In the overview in appendix 2 can also be seen that in seven clusters national sare cluster members, functioning as implementing partners. In the clusters where these national organizations are not a member, lack of knowledge and capacity was given as a reason. (YHRP 47) An interesting example of engagement of a national NGO in the cluster process is the Islamic Relief of Yemen acting as the second deputy coordinator in the Protection Cluster. (Vuco 5) In the CCCM/Shelter Cluster Islamic Relief of Yemen was responsible for information management. (CCCMM 6) The local organisations seem to function only as implementing partner at the field level. This may be due to the fact that there is very limited capacity for emergency response in Yemen,
because the GoY does not prioritise emergency response and therefore there are few local NGOs with a humanitarian orientation.\(^{(\text{RTE})}\).

Due to the violence and insecure situation, some international organisations retreated from the response. In these cases it was seen that local organisations had taken a prominent role in programming; however they were hampered by low capacity and limited funding.\(^{(\text{IDMC})}\)

Below the position of all the stakeholders in the cluster coordination and humanitarian response in Yemen is visualised.

*Fig. 9 Stakeholders in the Cluster Process in Yemen*

Source: Adapted from Inception Report Cluster Evaluation Phase 2 by Saskia Homoet

The figure above shows that, mostly, the international organisations in Yemen are central to the coordination process. However, the degree of inclusion of governmental as well as national and local NGOs varies across the clusters. That is the reason why the government as well as national NGOs, like Yemen Red Crescent, and some local NGOs are depicted in the stakeholder map as actor in the coordination process.
4.5 Communication mechanisms in the cluster process in Yemen

In the YHRP a lack of participation of local agencies in the field was mentioned as a lesson learnt. The solution given, to ensure better communication and share information with the field by means of regular meetings in the field, suggests that the lack of participation was caused by poor communication and by the distance between the national coordination in Sana’a and the field.

Language barrier in the meetings were partly addressed by having all the minutes of the cluster coordination meetings translated into Arabic whenever required (MYR 27). It was not mentioned if the meetings themselves were translated by means of an interpreter. The RTE by UNICEF indicates that meetings are often too many and too long (RTE, annex 1). One of the key challenges in cluster coordination remains recruiting cluster coordinators who speak Arabic (Vuco 9).

Small working groups have been set up. This led to better coordination and information sharing. These working groups were also introduced in the CCCM/Shelter cluster which is led by UNHCR. Furthermore, it was emphasized that partnerships would be strengthened with local organizations, NGOs and community based organisations to ensure inclusion in the response.

To share knowledge with local organisations the Humanitarian Forum Yemen (HFY), in cooperation with OCHA organised several workshops in 2010 and 2011. The subject was how to improve effective coordinated response including local organisations in emergency response and how local organisations could apply for funds from the CERF (HFY).

The YHRP received funding for its operations, albeit that most response activities remained underfunded. Most of the funding flows to UN agencies. The Mid Year Review (MYR) mentions that “no direct contributions were directed or reported to national NGOs even though many are often implementing partners of UN and INGOs.” (22) As a lesson learnt, strengthening of local partners was set as a goal by means of allocating ERF funds, although the amount was not mentioned.

Summarising, the degree in which local and national organizations are involved in the cluster process in Yemen differs per cluster. Challenges in communication that were recognised in
the documents were socio-cultural barriers (language), distance between national coordination and the field. Local organisations work at field level as implementing partner and communication with cluster coordination varies across the clusters; improvements have been made in better sharing information by means of working groups at field level. National NGOs and the GoY seem to be more involved in the cluster process. However, the fact that both national and local NGOs have little access to funding may be indicative of the attitude of international organisations vis-á-vis the local and national organisations. It was only when international organisations left the area, that local organisations played a more important role in programming. Unfortunately, they could do very little due to underfunding and lack of capacity.
Chapter 5 Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

An increasing awareness in the international community of gaps in humanitarian emergency response, prompted the UN to establish the Humanitarian Reform in 2005. One of the pillars of this reform is the cluster approach, which seeks to address challenges in the coordination of emergency response and consequently to improve timeliness, predictability and effectiveness in all areas of humanitarian response, like health, food, shelter etc. In 2007, the IASC commissioned the evaluation of the cluster approach and other aspects of the humanitarian reform in four countries (Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Uganda, and in 2009 in six countries (Chad, DRC, Gaza and Uganda, Haïti and Myanmar).

Although there were many positive results, the main challenges to be seen in the operation of the cluster approach are the degree of inclusion of local and national actors which had a negative effect on national and local ownership. Local and national organisations’ involvement is of paramount importance for local capacity building and ownership and ensuring sustainability of humanitarian intervention efforts.

In this study the focus is on the involvement of local and national NGOs in aid and emergency response within the cluster process in general and in Yemen in particular. The research assumption was that local and national actors are excluded from the coordination process due to the way the UN and international NGOs factually communicate with them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain understanding of the position of local and national organisations in the cluster approach through validation of the communication processes applied in the cluster coordination.

The following research question was addressed:

1. What designated role of local and national organisations is foreseen in the international humanitarian cluster approach?

2. What is the extent to which the quality of communication determines the actual degree of inclusion of these actors in the clusters with specific reference to the situation in Yemen?”

By means of document analysis, three concepts were researched and the links between these concepts were established and analysed. They are the concept of the cluster approach, the degree of inclusion of the local and national actors in the cluster coordination process, and the
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effect of communication by the international actors on the position in the cluster of the local and national organisations. The results of this analysis were compared to the cluster approach in Yemen and to the position of the local and national organisations in the cluster process in Yemen.

Before answering the main research question, a brief summary is given of what the cluster approach entails and how it functions; how the local and national organisations are included in the cluster process and what role communication mechanisms play in the inclusion of these local and national actors in the cluster approach. Then, the findings in the evaluation reports reveal what has been the level of proper communication tools for the benefit of including local and national actors in the cluster process. Lastly, the effect of communication mechanisms on the inclusion of local and national organizations in Yemen will be mentioned.

The cluster approach was established by the UN as part of the Humanitarian Reform in 2005 as a coordination tool for emergency response in all the areas of humanitarian aid. The purpose of the cluster approach was to make coordination of emergency response more timely, predictable and effective, by making a cluster lead organisation responsible and accountable for coordination activities. Furthermore, gaps in the response are avoided by prioritising emergency response at the field level.

The cluster approach exists at two levels; the global level and the country level. At the global level its aim is to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to be able to respond to humanitarian emergencies and it serves as a support to the clusters at the country level. At the same time at the country level its aim is to directly strengthen the humanitarian response to those affected by crises, by ensuring that there is a high level of predictability, accountability and partnership in the areas of activity and also that available resources are better prioritised by means of better labour division among the humanitarian organisations.

To share and gather information, regular meetings are held, chaired by the cluster coordinator. One of the responsibilities of the cluster lead is to develop and maintain links with government and local authorities. Furthermore, there is an inter-cluster coordination forum, chaired by UNOCHA, responsible for sharing information between the clusters. According to the IASC guidelines, the clusters are responsible for information management within the clusters; they have to generate up-to-date cluster specific information, like meeting minutes, standard forms and share these with cluster members. The cluster leads are also
responsible for involving the local and national organisations in the process by inviting them to cluster meetings.

The IASC emphasises promoting involvement of national and local organisations in the cluster process by the lead organisation of the cluster and building on local capacity is a key responsibility for the sector lead of the cluster. Moreover, one of the objectives of the cluster approach comprises strengthening ownership in the humanitarian response. Also the Principles of Partnership, the fourth pillar of the Humanitarian Reform, equality between organisations, transparency in communication and finance, building on local capacity and recognition of each other’s strength to complement each other in the humanitarian response, are presented as prerequisites for optimal cooperation between all humanitarian organisations, including local and national ones.

In the evaluations commissioned by the IASC, held in 2007 and 2009, it appeared that the local and national actors in the case study countries are still playing a marginal role in the cluster process. This was also illustrated by the communication structure and the stakeholder map. Local organisations are excluded from meetings, because the meetings are often not held in the local language, nor are the minutes translated into the local language. Also the use of jargon by the international organisations stands in the way of mutual understanding between international and local organisations. Communication refers to conveying a message as well as to the relationship between the communicators. The relationship is apparent in the attitude of international versus local/national organisations, because UN and the international organisations still determine who gets funding and they see local and national organisations more as implementing partners than as an equal partner in the coordination process.

Communication barriers that specifically apply to the relation between INGOs and local/national organisations are the following: socio-cultural; spatial (physical distance); quality of information (timely, accurate and relevant); attitudinal/behavioural, because, as was mentioned before, behaviour is communication. To overcome these barriers the following suggestions were made: the receiver must be taken seriously and this refers to attitude of the communicator in this case the international organisations; the message must be well thought out, focusing on the receiver, and various communication channels must be used; feedback must be ensured; information must be of good quality, meaning it should be timely, accurate and useful.
To sum up, the IASC and the Principles of Partnership promote equality between organisations, building on local capacity, transparency in communication and finance and recognition of each other’s strength; in spite of these aims, communication mechanisms between the international and local organisations active in the case study countries of the evaluations, have not been conducive to the inclusion of local and national organisations in the cluster process. This conclusion supports the research assumption of this study that local and national actors are excluded from the process of cluster coordination due to the way international organisations factually communicate with them.

In Yemen, the degree of inclusion of local and national partners and the communication mechanisms between the international organisations present a slightly different picture. It seems that there is an awareness among international organisations of the need of local and national organisations, although these organisations are, with one or two exceptions, hardly ever given the responsibility to act in the coordination process, or make decisions on programmes. Also in Yemen, cluster coordination remains a top-down process.

With respect to communication barriers the same pattern can be seen as in the evaluations of the case study countries. In Yemen too, there are challenges concerning language, distance, and attitude/behavior. The fact that funding is still channeled through the UN, makes it very hard for local and national organisations to access funds and this puts them at a disadvantage.

### 5.2 Recommendations

To ensure that local and national organizations are effectively included in the cluster coordination, it is crucial that they be engaged in genuine partnerships with international organizations. This means that they should have equal access to funds. Donors can play a role by “making participation by national and local actors in the cluster process a prerequisite for cluster funding”(Street n.p.)

Improving communication in the clusters between international and local organizations can be done by making meetings meaningful to all partners. So translations of minutes and the meetings themselves must be made common practice.
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To cover the distance between coordination at country level and field level, stronger field coordination mechanism needs to be ensured for example by means of working group, or a contact person at field level.

All new humanitarian staff in a response should be trained on the purpose of the cluster approach and on how to make communication more effective, taking into consideration the socio-cultural environment.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

In the conclusion was mentioned that cluster coordination is still a top down approach. The recommendation to make funding of international organisations conditional to the degree in which local and national are participating in the coordination process is a beginning to reverse the top down into a bottom-up approach. A trend in the discourse on the effectiveness of humanitarian response has been the question how civil society, national and local NGOs and CBOs could be placed at the centre of humanitarian action instead of on the periphery. This idea was presented as a “new Humanitarian Businessmodel” by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2009. Further research on this theme, would make a valuable contribution to the discussion on how to continue improving humanitarian response.
Bibliography


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Appendix 1

* A Matter of Perception.

Picture first published in 1915 by the British cartoonist W.E. Hill

Source: Google Images
## Appendix 2

### Overview Clusters in Yemen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster name</th>
<th>Relevant governmental institution</th>
<th>Cluster lead(s)</th>
<th>Cluster members and other humanitarian stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Recovery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>FAO, WFP UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, IPAD, Oxfam, IOM, SHF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>SC, CHF, RI, Sa’ada Women’s Association, AWU, CSSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Security and Agriculture</td>
<td>IMRC, MoAl</td>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM, UNHCR, ICS, IR, SC, OCHA, YFCA, RI ADRA, MDM, CSSW, MSI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>MoPHP</td>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>WHO, YWA, CSSW, MDM, SC, AMI, YFCA, RI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>MoPHP</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>WFP, WHO, YWA, CSSW, MDM, SC, AMI, YFCA, RI</td>
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<td>Protection</td>
<td>MoSAL, MoE, Executive Unit, MoHR</td>
<td>UNHCR, UNICEF</td>
<td>UNHCR, UNICEF, UNHCR (CP), UNFPA (SGBV), UNDP, RI, Amal, CHF, CSSW, IOM, DRC, IR, SC Oxfam, ADRA, YWU, Seyaj, InterSOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter/NFIs/CCCM</td>
<td>IMRC</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Al Amal, El Saleh, CSSW, IOM, IR, RI, Triangle, UNHCR, YRCS, ADRA, UAE Red Crescent Society, Oxfam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>GARWP, MoPHP</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>IOM, Oxfam, UNICEF, WHO</td>
</tr>
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<td>Coordination and Support Services</td>
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<td>OCHA, WFP, YINGKO, UNDSS, NF</td>
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<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>WFP, SC, ADRA, Intersos, DRC, IOM, SH, CSSW, SAD, IDF, IRD, Attakamol</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: YHRP 2011 (75)