Humanitarian Logistics and the Cluster Approach: Global Shifts and the U.S. Perspective

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Since disaster relief is about 80% logistics it would follow then that the only way to achieve [results-oriented programs and accountability] is through slick, efficient and effective logistics operations and more precisely, supply chain management. **LUK VAN WASSENHOVE**

**Abstract**

There is growing recognition among key humanitarian organizations that logistics plays an essential role in achieving greater synergies across and within the myriad of actors and institutions that currently constitute the humanitarian industry. In this chapter we examine the implications resulting from the establishment of the United Nations’ Cluster Approach strategy in responding to complex humanitarian emergencies. Specifically, we analyse the evolution of the Logistics Cluster with respect to key factors such as preparedness, coordination, accountability, and information and knowledge management. In the five years and 36 country roll-outs since its
establishment, the Logistics Cluster gets high marks operationally for improving coordination between and among other Clusters; information and knowledge sharing; building systematic emergency response capacity; and clarifying leadership roles and accountability between Cluster actors. Given its prominence as the global leader in foreign assistance and emergency relief, we also consider the role of US perceptions of and attitudes toward the Logistics Cluster and the overall Cluster Approach. We find that in spite of lingering challenges (eg civil–military coordination on logistics and global funding arrangements for the Clusters), the US government is positively disposed toward the Logistics Cluster. We conclude that the Logistics Cluster has met if not exceeded expectations as a key component of the Cluster Approach, and in a very short period of time has elevated the effectiveness of it as a global humanitarian response strategy.

Introduction

Whether it be in response to natural disasters like the 2005 Asian tsunami, man-made disasters like the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or the now common ‘embedded’ or ‘hybrid’ disasters involving both natural and man-made causes, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, adopting a supply chain management approach to humanitarian logistics (HL) holds great potential to enhance the future of humanitarian response and relief. HL stands as a key practical issue surrounding the systematic improvement of humanitarian action.

Analysing HL effectively involves a number of challenges for researchers. Altay (2008) has detailed the myriad issues affecting the study of HL, most of which are soft, ill-defined or mathematically difficult to code problems. Even though recent reviews of emergency management and the disaster relief literature provide a growing list of Operations Research/Management Science research, oddly enough many of the OR/MS models or applications developed so far fail to recognize this point (Altay and Green, 2006; Natarajarathinam et al, 2009; Simpson and Hancock, 2009). Moreover, the range and roles of actors involved in humanitarian action are both sizeable and complex, making it difficult to draw correlations, much less establish causality among factors and outcomes.

However, the importance of HL as a central component of humanitarian response has become increasingly recognized in recent years (Chaikin, 2003; Gustavsson, 2003). Logistics links nearly all stakeholders in humanitarian relief operations, including donor governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), local NGOs, the military, the private sector, and local communities (Oloruntoba and Gray, 2006). Operationally, the
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constraints facing many of these actors are multiple and overlapping. They include donor demand/pressure for accountability and transparency, competition for scarce funding resources, marketization of the INGO sector, high levels of staff turnover and low levels of institutional memory, and a lack of effective evaluation mechanisms. Enhancing humanitarian logistics capacity and operational effectiveness has thus formed a critical element of global humanitarian reform undertaken by the international community and the structural manifestation of that process, the United Nations (UN) Cluster Approach (CA).

In this chapter we utilize this humanitarian supply chain management framework and its associated elements to examine more closely the implications carried by the establishment of the CA, broadly, and the Logistics Cluster (LC), specifically. Many of the norms undergirding this relatively new approach to humanitarian response reflect key elements constituting effective humanitarian logistics and supply chain frameworks. They include preparedness, coordination, leadership, accountability, and information and knowledge management. Given its prominence as the global leader in foreign assistance and emergency relief, we also explore shifts in US perspectives on the CA and the LC, and offer conclusions about the future of humanitarian response under the CA and the role the LC is likely to play in this area. It is important to note, however, that much of the analysis in this chapter derives from examining the ‘donor’ side of humanitarian logistics. The impetuses for global humanitarian reform and evolving perspectives regarding the role of logistics that are constitutive of that effort have typically been driven by developed countries. While we feel that this inherent constraint necessarily limits the kinds of conclusions we can reasonably draw, it is, for the present time at least, a reality of the politics of humanitarianism with which we must grapple.

Background

Prior to the roll-out of the CA, very little natural or planned ‘alignment’ occurred among humanitarian actors to meet the challenges of enhancing HL. This had been the case both at the international level and even at the national level in some countries (eg the US response to Hurricane Katrina). Effective alignment requires, among other strategies, a ‘standardization of tasks and products and a well designed infrastructure which consequently will promote coordination through assessment, management and dissemination of information’ (Altay, 2008: 163). In part, this has been due to the nature of the actors operating within and across the humanitarian sector, donor funding priorities, a lack of common operational standards, and a scepticism among many humanitarian actors regarding centralization and coordination from above.
Some scholars argue that HL currently resembles the corporate world’s logistics environment of 20 years ago, characterized as it was by underinvestment, lack of recognition, and no real training opportunities/standards across the industry (Thomas and Kopczak, 2005; Beamon and Kotleba, 2006). This was largely the norm both at the international and donor country levels. It has also been claimed that because the humanitarian sector operates without the market forces of demand and supply regulated through price, there are few incentives to coordinate efforts or to use lessons learned to improve over time in any area, including humanitarian logistics (van Wassenhove, 2006). Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the supply network of HL differs from corporate logistics in that there are no clear or stated linkages among the actors in HL (Kovács and Spens, 2007).

HL has also historically taken a back seat in emergency response planning, budgetary processes, and decision-making in part because of the lack of consensus about its function and importance. According to some, the ‘basic mentality’ of logisticians in such situations has tended to be ‘led by project managers’ (Rickard, 2003: 9). The sub-optimal potential of this mindset has been compounded when humanitarian actors working in the same crisis zone failed to collaborate and instead maintained stove-pipe arrangements that perpetuated ad hoc arrangements, inefficient procurement strategies, and duplicate efforts across organizations working in the same or related sectors (or parts of a disaster-affected country).

Recent evidence suggests however, that there is growing recognition at the global and national levels among key humanitarian actors, including the UN system, IFRC, INGOs and the private sector, of both the importance of and need for preparedness (hence also indirectly logistics) in response to disasters (van Wassenhove, 2006). An example of regional cooperation on HL involving developing countries has been the creation, by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), of the Emergency Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPRWG). The EPRWG is constituted by 17 countries from the Great Lakes region and East Africa. It aims to improve practical collaboration and develop regionally informed solutions to common humanitarian response problems, develops initiatives to share procurement services and organizes resource sharing for logistics components of relief operations such as charter flights and contingency stocks. The EPRWG also trains staff for joint emergency preparedness; attempts to discover and apply to humanitarian operations appropriate corporate-derived logistics systems and encourages common standards for relief resources and equipment so more agencies can use the same kinds of materials but still keep their individual logos and markings on them for use on the ground (Fenton, 2003).

Another example is the UN Joint Logistics Center (UNJLC). From a coordination standpoint, management of uncertainty during a humanitarian response, particularly through information sharing and cooperation between agencies, is critical to effective response (Altay, 2008). The need for an inter-agency coordination mechanism to deal specifically with logistics
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issues led to the creation of the UNJLC (Kaatrud et al., 2003). The UNJLC falls under the auspices of the World Food Programme (WFP) and, when triggered, is integrated into UN response coordination structures to support inter-agency logistics coordination and asset management. The UNJLC attempts to alleviate procurement and supply bottlenecks; tries to eliminate duplication and competition; serves as a liaison/broker to pool purchasing power among actors; arranges storage space and local transportation; establishes satellite offices to assist with logistics and supply chain management among various actors; and serves as an information clearing house and disseminator to humanitarian and other actors on the ground.

Despite these advances, more effective mechanisms for coordination and collaboration in HL as well as the field of humanitarian assistance and response were needed (OCHA, 2005). The inadequacy of the initial international response to the Asian tsunami in late 2004/early 2005, for example, was a wake-up call for many humanitarian actors. The 2005 Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) process and the subsequent establishment of the CA are the results of this recognition. The HRR recommended a new humanitarian response strategy premised on a range of factors, including predictability, timeliness and effectiveness via: 1) ensuring predictable funding; 2) strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator system; and 3) strengthening the overall humanitarian response capacity (OCHA, 2006a). The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) fulfills 1 above; 2 is being addressed by developing mechanisms to improve training and qualification systems for HCs; and 3 is being fulfilled via the CA.

Collectively, the HRR and the CA represent one of the most significant innovation attempts in the coordination and capacity-building of humanitarian response and disaster management undertaken by the international community. From the perspective of HL, the CA reflects the potential value-added of investing in and integrating how to get the ‘right goods to the right people in the right time frame’ into a more holistic and centralized effort to make humanitarian response more effective.

Change afoot – the cluster approach and implications for humanitarian logistics

The cluster approach stands as the prevailing organizational meta-strategy for humanitarian emergencies response. It emanated from the 2005 HRR, which identified gaps in and offered far-reaching recommendations for humanitarian coordination, preparedness and response to both natural disasters and complex emergencies. The review was thorough and comprehensive. We do not attempt to cover all areas of it in this chapter, but rather focus on areas of the review that tackled issues most closely
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related to HL. This overview also helps inform our analysis in the remaining sections of the chapter.

In the broadest terms, the HRR found that efforts designed to ensure logistical capabilities have been inconsistent and were closely linked to deficiencies in organizational coordination and capacity (OCHA, 2005). These factors, in turn, affected preparedness and response, both constituting vital dimensions of the disaster management cycle (Tomasini and Van Wassenhove, 2009). For example, although radio and telecommunications capabilities varied widely across organizations, most humanitarian agencies either did not know how to use their telecom technology or had difficulties accessing them when they were most needed. This was especially true in fluid response situations and/or where military presence on the ground complicated obtaining technology-use clearance. Moreover, efforts designed to ensure adequate stockpiling of emergency relief supplies were inconsistent and performance was almost always linked to organizational capacity. Smaller humanitarian organizations, for example, retained limited stockpiles designed for short-term use. Larger organizations, by contrast, stockpiled a wider range of goods, using them across different emergency phases.

The HRR also revealed that organizational reliance on individual solutions rather than coordinated, collective action constituted a major constraint to improved logistics and the supply chain across the humanitarian spectrum. For example, very few INGOs indicated that they utilized common sources of humanitarian supplies (e.g., through the UNJLC), whereas nearly all UN agencies made some use of pooled resources (OCHA, 2005). In addition, the review noted that procurement processes among agencies were carried out independent of one another; 80 per cent of the organizations surveyed indicated that they did not utilize any coordinated procurement policy (OCHA, 2005). Some 75 per cent of humanitarian spending is handled by fewer than 15 large transnational organizations (Feinstein International Famine Center, 2004). From a logistics standpoint, the purchasing power of this cadre should not be overlooked. Coordination among these mega-INGOs could dramatically lower costs of procurement and warehousing, and result in more efficient outlay of resources that does not compromise flexibility and speed in response. It could also render investment in technology much more cost-efficient and financially feasible, reduce information processing costs and increase the value of shared information and data among humanitarian actors at all levels.

The CA was thus born out of a widely-recognized need for building systemic capacity for coordinated humanitarian response. The HRR recommended developing clusters constituted by organizations and other stakeholders with a designated lead agency, in gap areas such as service provision (emergency telecommunications, logistics); traditional relief and assistance sectors (water/sanitation, nutrition, health, emergency shelter); and cross-cutting issues (camp coordination/management, early recovery, protection).

Key HRR recommendations concerning humanitarian logistics included:
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- Create consistent measurement standards for all humanitarian actors regarding surge capacity via stockpiles.
- Engage in global mapping of relief stocks and establish regularized transmission procedures for updated information through various humanitarian networks to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).
- Generate increased awareness of the logistics planning and implementation benefits of using the UNJLC and the Humanitarian Common Services (HCS).
- Establish more predictable and sufficient donor support for the UNJLC.

Enthusiasm for the development of the CA was not shared by all major humanitarian donors. The US, although an interested party, was not a driver of the process. The UK and several northern European countries were among the most active and supportive actors in the process. According to at least one professional closely involved in the CA’s establishment, the US role was in keeping with its prevailing scepticism regarding whether centralized UN coordination constitutes the ‘silver bullet’ to achieve meaningful reform or that coordination is the single most important factor to improve humanitarian response effectiveness. As the world’s largest provider of foreign assistance and emergency relief, the US may also have been sanguine about committing to new arrangements that might, in turn, necessitate the commitment of new resources. After the IASC agreed on the CA, the US was an active participant in the Geneva-based donor group that worked with the IASC agencies and clusters in funding the CA’s initial implementation.

Among the humanitarian donors polled by HRR, however, more than two-thirds cited coordination to be among the top three most important elements for improving global humanitarian performance. Sound needs assessment; effective management; greater accountability; and reducing the number of actors operating in humanitarian settings were also ranked as high-priority reform issues. Interestingly, donors ranked higher levels of preparedness and faster reaction as being less important for improving contemporary humanitarian response (OCHA, 2005).

Most scholars and practitioners agree that the CA represents a major change in the way humanitarian assistance is implemented at both the global, regional and national levels and creates complementarities among the actors involved. The CA is innovative because it generates clear lines of accountability and reporting; addresses capacity-building through unconventional approaches; and should lead to partnerships for common planning and implementation of humanitarian relief (OCHA, 2006a; Jury and DeMaio, 2007).

Global clusters were developed in 11 sectors – in the ‘service provision’ area, Logistics is chaired by the WFP, and Emergency Telecommunications
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is chaired by OCHA (process owner), while UNICEF serves as the common data communications service provider, and WFP as common security telecommunications provider (OCHA, 2006a).

In the field, Logistics Cluster operations are expected to:

- fill logistics gaps and alleviate bottlenecks;
- prioritize logistics interventions and investments;
- collect/share information and assets;
- coordinate port and corridor movements to reduce congestion;
- provide details of transporters and rough indication of market rates;
- provide guidance on customs issues;
- provide information on equipment and/or relief items suppliers.

In terms of resources, the cost of implementing the CA in its first year was approximately US $40 million. Of this, nearly one-quarter (the largest apportionment) of the budget was designated for LC operations. On the one hand, this may be interpreted as recognition by the international community of the importance of logistics in humanitarian operations. Alternatively, it may be an indicator of the decades of neglect that logistics has experienced in the humanitarian realm.

Business as usual or... ?

As noted above, the gaps identified by the HRR in logistics relate mainly to coordination and capacity deficiencies, both of which are important dimensions in facilitating effective disaster management. The gaps included a lack of inter-agency contingency planning; the absence of a global network of warehouse facilities for use in rapid response to emergencies; lack of supply-chain information exchange (no coordinating body exists) or communications platforms for such exchanges between IGOs, NGOs, donors, suppliers; no global mapping of inventory of relief stocks; lack of inter-agency logistics response teams (LRTs) to carry out comprehensive and timely needs assessments; a strong need for improved information exchange on use of military and civil defense assets (MCDA) as part of emergency/humanitarian response; and a lack of coordination of airfield traffic and congestion during emergencies and especially natural disasters (OCHA, 2006a).

As the LC lead, WFP has demonstrated consistent and strong leadership and coordination. For example, it dedicates staff to focus on information and mapping logistics data as part of the inter-agency contingency planning process. WFP maintains its capacity to provide sufficient, high-quality supplies for preparedness and response and coordination with other actors of pre-positioning of relief inventories and warehousing arrangements (eg via its five Humanitarian Response Depots). It also identifies urgently
needed relief items and attempts to ensure an ‘under 48-hour- organizational response time, thereby reducing warehousing and freight costs and advancing coordinated procurement. WFP has also developed a register of emergency stockpiles, managed against its baseline data gathering. Information on the most commonly needed non-food items as well as most-frequently stocked items are pooled and made available to humanitarian agencies that touch on each of the other traditional and relief sectors (eg sanitation, health, food).

The field-level rollout of the CA was not without challenges. First implemented in 2006 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), an interim review revealed high levels of confusion among humanitarian actors regarding the roles each agency should play. Many of the concepts embedded within the CA were not well understood by implementing agencies or INGOs (eg organizational and operational concepts such as provider of last resort, accountability, and cluster versus sector leads). The review also noted that, in spite of OCHA efforts there was a general lack of understanding among field staff regarding what cluster leads were expected to do and how they would carry out their mandates (OCHA, 2006b). In Chad, the CA received initial praise and appeared to have enhanced stakeholder buy-in as participating organizations were required to affiliate with a cluster, take part in overall strategy design for that cluster, and then implement the agreed-upon cluster strategy. According to some INGOs on the ground (eg CARE), this approach also enhanced cooperation between technical coordination within and across clusters by identifying which humanitarian organizations were best-equipped to provide particular services and reaching consensus on adapting international standards for implementation (IRIN, 2008).

The two most recent evaluations of the CA yield further insights into its impact of HL and supply network management on the effectiveness of humanitarian response. The first review, finalized in 2007, focused on CA processes at the global level. The second evaluation concentrates on the results and effects of the CA at the country and field level. The combined findings of both undertakings reveal the CA as a maturing institutional arrangement that enjoys continued strong commitment from important stakeholders. Its roll-out has not been without difficulties, but with continued and careful monitoring and analysis, the CA is well-positioned to facilitate higher levels of humanitarian response effectiveness in the medium- and long-term.

It should be noted that all clusters are being held to achieving a single overarching standard, with other operational standards flowing from it. The IASC Working Group baseline capacity parameters and preparedness standards are that all clusters should be able to respond to three major new emergencies per year, affecting 500,000 beneficiaries each, with two of the annual emergencies occurring simultaneously. At the time of writing, only one of the 11 clusters has met this baseline as of 2007 – the Logistics Cluster.
In terms of operational standards, the 2007 review showed that early challenges to the CA, which included confusion among cluster leads and implementing partners, some ‘lingering ill-will’, and uneven performance across case settings, did not overshadow what was an overall ‘systematic improvement in coordinated humanitarian response’. Clusters in the field appeared to produce many improvements on their own, as the global clusters worked to complete capacity projects in the initial phase of the rollout (Stoddard et al, 2007: 1). From the standpoint of disaster cycle management, the LC (along with the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster) has excelled in the area of coordination, including sharing material stockpile lists, personnel rosters and deployable staff lists. Where individual clusters underperformed, the attributable cause was nearly always a lack of leadership – either by the cluster lead organization or by coordination actors. ‘It goes without saying that agencies with the best funding, the best-quality and largest number of staff, the best in-depth field presence and the best NGO network are also the best cluster leads’ (Stoddard et al, 2007: 9).

One important finding of the 2010 review is that the institutional learning has continued to improve within all clusters, including the LC. In addition, the report found that leadership has become more ‘predictable’ and leadership roles are now better clarified. Overall coordination levels are also higher among cluster organizations, and this provides focal points for other actors on the ground (local and governmental actors, including local NGOs). The 2010 review also noted that clusters are engaging in peer accountability, sharing information, developing lessons-learned exercises among clusters and dialoguing with one another on strategic, operational and technical issues (Streets et al, 2010). A lingering challenge however, involves inter-cluster coordination, which remains weak and ineffective. As was the case in 2007, leadership by cluster coordinators still has a direct impact on cluster effectiveness.

All of the reviews and critiques of the CA convey the message that it is an evolving and innovative concept and it is not business as usual for the humanitarian sector any more. For example, WFP continues to strive to improve the operations of the LC. WFP enlists field experts specializing in the appropriate use of MCDAs and to manage their implementation in humanitarian response. It maintains established procedures for managing and mitigating airfield congestion by entering into agreements with local authorities and experts to identify strategic air hubs and negotiate with local authorities. And, WFP continues to sustain supply chain management capacity via the LC web interface (http://www.logcluster.org/), which consolidates resources on every crisis setting where the LC has been activated. The site provides up-to-the minute information on stockpiles, road conditions, cargo tracking, customs information, offers logistics capacity assessments, information management kits, accurate maps and logistics operational guides. It is, literally, a one-stop shop for humanitarian logistics.
US perspectives on humanitarian logistics, the CA and the LC

Humanitarian assistance and relief have long constituted key foreign assistance undertakings of the US government, USAID, its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This does not mean that the US and international-level strategies have naturally aligned with one another, but in the area of logistics there are several trends worth noting, particularly where they align with the CA and the LC.

First, and in spite of the CA being a ‘centralized’ institutional arrangement, both it and US disaster-response reforms are guided by the principle of subsidiarity in relation to strategic thinking and operational response parameters. Subsidiarity focuses operational authority and implementation at the most effective level – in the field of emergency management and response, this means favouring smaller, decentralized approaches to mitigate crises. In the US governance framework, local governments are considered to be first responders, with state government intervening when local capacities are overwhelmed or when more ‘complex’ solutions need to be carried out by higher level authorities. Much like the CA, US federal authorities assist in emergency response by providing critical and emergency funding, access to resources, and orchestrating coordination during the response phase. Moreover, all CA rollouts are carefully tailored to meet the needs of specific crises. Not all clusters are activated where national capacity in a particular sector is deemed to be sufficient, and even within sectors (eg logistics) there is a preference for utilizing national-level resources wherever possible. And, in the CA, cluster leads provide last resort, filling gaps where other organizations within a particular cluster are unable to do so.

Second, organizational alignment exists between the CA and the US Disaster Assistance framework (see Table 5.1). Like the LC, USAID/OFDA’s Logistics Sector focuses on preparedness, coordination and capacity-enhancement. It pre-positions and stocks relief items at regional hubs around the world, including Florida, Italy and the United Arab Emirates. Like WFP’s Augmented Logistics Intervention Team for Emergencies, the Sector also fields a full-time logistics team that can be augmented with additional US-based logistics personnel from other agencies who specialize in areas such as search and rescue. Coordination is also key to the Logistics Sector’s work. Logistics experts at USAID/OFDA headquarters coordinate relief supply transportation and delivery (USAID, 2010), much like the LC lead agency, WFP, coordinates relief supply delivery in tandem with the UN Humanitarian Air Service, its own ocean transportation and surface transport services, and the UNJLC.

Third and perhaps most importantly, at both the international and national levels, logistics appears to be enjoying a renewed importance as a key element in effective disaster response. In 2007, for example, FEMA
### Table 5.1 Organization of disaster assistance/response

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Elevated Logistics from a branch to a directorate, signifying a positive change in mindset about its importance in emergency response. The recent reorganization of FEMA also mirrors the CA’s structural framework of assigning ‘lead’ institutional actors for each cluster, including Logistics. FEMA has also established a National Logistics Coordinator, whose principal responsibilities include strategic capability, coordination, preparedness and creating more streamlined and effective accounting, procurement and tracking systems. This role is similar to that played by Cluster Leads in various sectors at the international level.

Logistics also feature prominently in each of OFDA’s three central divisions. Within DRM, for example, logistics management is central to its ability to coordinate and operationalize the use of technology for both natural and man-made crisis prevention and preparedness. Within OPS, all logistical, technical and operational facets of emergency response are offered, including search and rescue, and response teams to coordinate and operate both in the field and from Washington, DC. USAID/OFDA deploys Disaster Assessment Response Teams (DARTs) to crises around the world to conduct immediate damage and needs assessments for USAID partners on the ground. It also attempts to strengthen disaster planning, early warning and preparedness capacities in crisis-affected nations (USAID,
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And, within the PS division, administrative, financial and programmatic support is provided in areas such as procurement, budget planning and tracking, and support for communications in the field and in Washington, DC.

Among USAID’s operating principles are several that align closely with the LC’s fundamentals of supply chain management in emergency response and humanitarian crisis management (Tomasini and Van Wassenhove, 2009). They include resource allocation based on country analysis and capacities, transparency in operations and information-sharing; coordination within the organization and among its implementing partners and other stakeholders; sustaining collaborative efforts with inter-agency partners to more effectively integrate and coordinate foreign assistance; and professionalizing staff at both headquarters and in the field (USAID, 2006). Related to this is the demonstrated ‘value-added’ of logistics to emergency response and disaster management. According to a senior WFP representative, US government agencies recognize the desirability and benefit of the LC and have been highly supportive of its work, in large part because measurements of effectiveness are relatively easy to identify and measure. This has not been the case with other global clusters.6

There are at least two areas where alignment continues to pose challenges. The first is logistics coordination with military actors – Haiti being the most recent example of this. USAID/OFDA logisticians worked closely with the Air Forces Special Operations Command to manage and coordinate relief flights and search and rescue equipment arriving into the airport at Port-au-Prince (USAID, 2010). In contrast and while the UN Logistics Cluster does partner with military actors and utilize military assets for its supply chain management and emergency response, it does so in close consultation with the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief. These standards were established to help IGO and NGO actors preserve the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality in relief operations. The logistics sector of US government emergency response is not held to these standards – and in many cases, the military constitute a central and key actor with clearly delegated domestic humanitarian response responsibilities. There is, however, evidence that the military is becoming more concerned with the civilian–military dimension of HL. For example, WFP and other LC partners have been approached by individual military commands from different countries, including the US, to learn more about the CA and work more effectively in the area of logistics with non-military actors.7

Another key issue for the US is funding for humanitarian response through the CA. As the global leader in foreign assistance and disaster relief (see Note 1) a natural concern of the US government with regards to the CA is its funding mechanism. US support has been very good for the service-oriented clusters and, in particular, for the LC. The US remains wary of pooled global funds and has not been a strong supporter of the CERF. It has also increasingly signalled its preference for moving away from extra-
budgetary funding for the LC (the US typically is among the first donors approached for these needs). It favours a more sustainable arrangement involving the funding mainstreaming within the core operating budgets of the cluster lead, or through some share of country operations that the US presently supports.6

Conclusion

The intention in the adoption of the CA as part of the global humanitarian reform was to strengthen predictability, response capacity, coordination and accountability in emergency and disaster relief by strengthening partnerships in key sectors of humanitarian response, and by formalizing the lead role of particular agencies/organizations in each of these sectors (Stoddard et al., 2007). As of late 2009, the CA had been rolled out in 36 countries – and OCHA’s goal is to extend the roll-out to every country that has a Humanitarian Coordinator.7 At the international level, the CA can help ensure predictable leadership and accountability, as well as strengthening system-wide preparedness and coordination of the technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies. At the country level, it creates high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership in all areas of humanitarian response (Jury and DeMaio, 2007). There are, on the other hand, at least two issues that remain unaddressed.

It should be noted that not all humanitarian actors found the establishing of the CA, including the LC, to be praiseworthy. Among the most common complaints registered was that the CA process has been top-down and UN-driven (IRIN, 2008). Others expressed the view that the CA appeared to be more about money and politics rather than creating positive outcomes for aid beneficiaries. From a bureaucratic standpoint, some emphasized that one of the CA’s most serious drawbacks was that it increased humanitarian agency workload by creating new layers of administration and consultation without providing additional resources to perform these added responsibilities.

Many humanitarian actors outside the UN system feel that the current structures related to humanitarian response are very much ‘UN driven’ and do not always meet INGO expectations (OCHA, 2005: 46). Here, the lead organization concept was encouraged to be implemented system-wide – to increase efficiency by encouraging effective use of expertise and technical know-how of a variety of organizations and especially a designated lead organization (OCHA, 2005).

The US has been a bit less enamoured of the CA stemming from its general scepticism of centralized UN coordination as a solution to global humanitarian problems. The US supports the coordination agenda of the UN – its position on a variety of coordination mechanisms (not all) has been positive. It remains less convinced that centralized coordination is the silver
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bullet to achieve meaningful humanitarian reform or that coordination is
the single most important factor to improve disaster response effectiveness.
In contrast, the US favours the kind of demonstrated effectiveness that
perhaps is more measurable in some clusters, such as the LC.

Our analysis in this chapter hints that the CA is a step in the right
direction in humanitarian response. Moreover, there are important areas of
alignment with US foreign assistance and disaster management frameworks.
Clearly the model is a work in progress and needs further refinement.
However, it does improve the collection, processing and dissemination of
information through generating clear lines of accountability and reporting,
and pooling resources. The fact that there is a LC alone shows that the
humanitarian aid industry is starting to recognize the critical role logistics
plays in coordinating an effective response – by extension and in theory, the
value of information in humanitarian response should also be enhanced.

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**Notes**

1 Between 2002 and 2004, for example, US contributions to humanitarian assistance constituted 39 per cent, 44 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively, of the global total (OCHA, 2005: 102). As of June 2010, the US had contributed 24 per cent of the global total of both Consolidated and Flash Appeals. See UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service, available at: http://www.reliefweb.int/fts or http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/reports/daily/ocha_R6_Y2010___1006260211.pdf (accessed 26 June 2010).

2 Author telephone interview with senior staff member of the World Food Programme, 24 June 2010.

3 In addition to several independent evaluations that have dealt with specific clusters or emergencies (ActionAid International, 2007; Houghton, 2008; Thomas, 2006), two other evaluations have also been carried out by OCHA; an interim self-assessment (OCHA, 2006c) and an assessment of global cluster capacity building (OCHA, 2007).

4 Operationally, this has been difficult to implement in some settings. Many CA clusters do not make adequate ‘capacity’ assessments and instead focus on ‘needs’ assessments – which may mean missing out on or ignoring local capacity and partnership opportunities. See Streets, *et al* (2010).

5 Disaster Response and Mitigation (DRM), Operations Support (OPS) and Program Support (PS).

6 Author telephone interview with senior staff member of the World Food Programme, 24 June 2010.

7 For the complete list of countries, see: http://www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Portals/1/cluster%20approach%20page/clusters%20pages/WASH/CA_with_implementation_dates-Nov.2009.pdf.