IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN EMERGENCIES:
A CASE STUDY FROM SOMALIA WASH CLUSTER
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn Harries is an expert in knowledge management and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Her initial exposure to knowledge management came when working on sewage treatment plants, in Sydney Australia. She later developed an Integrated Management System (covering quality, environment and safety), and accredited to the international quality standard ISO 9001 and environment standard ISO 14001, for the eight business units involved in the wastewater process. With a Masters in Engineering Science, and Post-graduate diploma from the Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC), Kathryn has since worked as a WASH Specialist in the Philippines, East Timor, India, Sri Lanka, Somalia, and with the global WASH Cluster in Geneva. As WASH Cluster Coordinator for Somalia (Dec 2010 - Aug 2012), she implemented a practical knowledge management approach to maximise the impact of the humanitarian response with the available funds. Through over 17 years of experience in the sector, Kathryn believes the management of knowledge, especially to support field level WASH practitioners, to be one of the key gaps in WASH humanitarian response and development.

Kathryn would like to acknowledge the important contribution of the WASH Cluster team and members for developing an effective knowledge management system, particularly, Cluster team members over this period: Damien Brosnan, Shem Okiomeri and Fatuma Ali.
INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of humanitarian agencies is to alleviate human suffering from disaster or conflict and to meet the basic needs of people affected by these emergencies.

The Humanitarian Reform in 2005 established the Cluster approach as “part of a wider reform process aimed at improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability and accountability, while at the same time strengthening partnerships”. At country level, Clusters have been tasked with ensuring “a more coherent and effective response by mobilizing groups of agencies, organisations and NGOs to respond in a strategic manner across all key sectors or areas of activity.”

To achieve the best outcomes possible, it is critical for each Cluster to manage knowledge effectively to assist Cluster members. WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) is one of eleven Clusters. Other Clusters include Nutrition, Health, Food Security, Education, Protection, Emergency Shelter and Logistics.

In the last two decades few countries have experienced a more protracted emergency than Somalia. Absence of a functioning central government and ongoing conflict, has led to a lack of access to basic social services, resulting in the country falling amongst the highest child and maternal mortality rates in the world. Only 30 per cent of Somalia’s population has access to improved drinking water sources and 23 per cent to improved sanitation facilities. At the end of 2010 when drought was declared, the Somalia WASH Cluster scaled up activities. However, the situation deteriorated in 2011 and caused large-scale displacement within the country and to neighbouring countries. It became the first famine officially declared since 1991-92. During 2011-12, the Cluster brought together over 170 local and international NGOs, Government departments and UN agencies working in WASH sector to support people in need.

In responding to this chronic humanitarian crisis, access posed an additional challenge. Somalia is widely considered to be “one of the most challenging and dangerous environments in the world for aid workers”.

Unlike in other emergencies where international humanitarian WASH experts often with specialised equipment can establish programmes and build the capacity of national staff onsite, international staff and a number of international organisations had limited access (if any) in many areas of Somalia, particularly in the South. The main coordination mechanisms, including Clusters, also worked remotely from Nairobi, Kenya. Thus, local NGOs were even more critical to effective response. In this environment, with the ever-changing nature of the emergency, the Somalia WASH Cluster under the leadership of WASH Cluster Coordinator established a knowledge management system to improve the humanitarian WASH actions.

This learning paper captures the experience of the Somalia WASH Cluster and draws lessons on how an effective knowledge management system can be developed and implemented. The paper aims to provide an example framework of a successful knowledge management system that can be adapted by other national WASH Clusters to support a predictable, effective, timely and coherent WASH emergency preparedness and response.

The paper will first outline the concept of knowledge management before featuring the key aspects of the knowledge management system in Somalia: basic components; challenges and actions; knowledge flow; backbones of the system; and feedback from the system users. Lastly, it will highlight lessons learned from this experience.

1 SPHERE Handbook (2011)
3 ibid.
Knowledge management has been defined as “a systematic effort to enable information and knowledge to grow, flow, and create value. The discipline is about creating and managing the processes to get the right knowledge to the right people at the right time and help people share and act on information in order to improve [...] performance.”

A critical component of a knowledge management system is continual improvement. The knowledge management system serves as a “keystone” allowing everyone to work at the same level.

An effective knowledge management system makes key information available to all, regardless of the attendance of training, physical location or time spent in the position. It provides transparency within the Cluster operation, and retains information within the Cluster when turnover of members occurs. Hence, it gets new staff and organisations quickly up to speed on locally effective programming, current needs and gaps, local coordination mechanisms, and their role as a member. As a whole, it facilitates effective cluster coordination to enable agencies to better meet the needs of people affected by an emergency. It should be noted that not all knowledge management systems are useful. Some capture information that is never or rarely used, and field practitioners resort to reinventing the wheel. This can result from too many case studies, or long theoretical documents, which practitioners have little time to read, or find the useful components within.

WASH Cluster coordination handbook (2009) says that IM in the context of humanitarian response refers to “the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of information.” In humanitarian response, IM generally includes the 4W matrix (who is doing what, where and when) and needs assessment information. The data is collected from the field, analysed (generally in excel format) and shared back to Cluster agencies in useful formats (maps, simple tables, etc.) in order to improve their response. IM requires a good level of IT skills. Knowledge management however covers the “whole of work” that is all the components of Plan (strategy and plans), Do (standards and response), Check (monitoring and feedback), and Act (taking action to address issues raised in the “Check” phase). Knowledge management also includes capturing personal experience, so called “tacit” knowledge (e.g. good practice and lessons learned).

Source: Adjusted from Sydney Water Integrated Management System
The knowledge management system of the Somalia WASH Cluster encompassed the following basic steps:

- Establish a structure, to provide transparent, representative decision-making on strategic issues, and empower local decision-making for fast appropriate response
- Facilitate agencies and individuals to learn from each other at as local level as possible, and reach agreement on good practice
- Collate the agreed good practice into short and simple guides, relevant for use by the target audience (generally field level WASH practitioners)
- Disseminate the latest good practice documents by making sure their easy access, regardless of the location of users
- Establish a clear version control (document management) system to support continual improvement of processes and their respective documents
- Put mechanisms in place to receive feedback from users to maintain the relevance and usefulness

By establishing this system, the Cluster ensured that relevant information was available to all stakeholders whenever and wherever needed in a transparent manner, promoting greater predictability and accountability, while strengthening partnerships.

### CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS

The development of the knowledge management system was a gradual process that took into account specific opportunities and challenges posed by the Somali context. Some key challenges faced by the Somalia WASH Cluster were reflected in the architecture of the knowledge management system.

**Challenge 1:**

**Somalia is a chronic humanitarian crisis, rather than a rapid onset emergency, however the response was largely focused on short-term action**

**Action:**

- A **Strategic Advisory Group** (SAG) was formed, and identified the main issues preventing WASH agencies from achieving “effective sustainable humanitarian WASH action”. These were then used to develop a **three-year rolling plan**, along with actions to improve the WASH response over time. The multi-year timeframe allowed for changes in focus (e.g. following an emergency) and/or in key staff, whilst maintaining the overall direction of the Cluster. The SAG was a representative group of WASH experts from UN, Red Crescent/ICRC, international and local NGOs, including Somalia based technical experts (remote contribution), to reflect the needs and experience of Cluster agencies at all levels.

- The Cluster defined a small set of **indicators** for specific WASH activities. For instance, fixed indicators were used to measure **sustained** water interventions (e.g. protected shallow wells) and **temporary** water interventions (e.g. water trucking) separately. If the subsequent analysis, and maps, produced from the 4W (who is doing what, where and when) matrix indicated that a region had only temporary water interventions, this approach allowed the Cluster to identify a gap for more sustained water inventions, and respond to improve the longer-term resilience of the community.

- Community based **water access by voucher**, for example, was introduced to improve accountability over emergency water trucking. A **short guide** was developed by a Technical Working Group, believed to be the first globally, which includes example vouchers and draft agreement between agency and local water vendor.

**Challenge 2:**

**Limited capacity of members, limited physical access, and high turn-over of staff**

**Action:**

- Agreed good practices were collated into simple, short, relevant, and useful documents for practical use, and were easily accessible on the country WASH Cluster website. A good example is the **WASH Cluster Strategy and Standards guide** (previously the Strategic Operational Framework: SOF) which includes a 1 page **Gender guide**, a 3 page **Do No harm guide** for conflict reduction, and **Inter-Cluster matrices** to leverage quality of response by working together.

- As restricted access also limited the ability to conduct needs assessments, **District Focal Points** were established and tasked to report any change of needs at the start of each Regional (sub-national) Cluster meeting. During the conflict, famine and mass displacement in 2011-12 needs changed rapidly. This approach was found to be effective in regularly providing locally relevant information to Cluster partners, and also encouraged attendance at sub-national WASH Cluster meetings for sharing information and agreeing actions jointly.

- **Regional Focal Points were elected democratically** from local NGOs. Once the election process was agreed, and size of each region confirmed by the Regional Clusters, individuals nominated for the Regional and Deputy Focal Point positions. The election was managed remotely by the National Cluster team using Survey monkey, with one vote per agency working in each region, as listed in the 4W Matrix. The results were collated by the IM Specialist.
Challenge 3: Acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) / Cholera preparation, prevention and response, to avoid escalation in infant mortality, and in those weakened by famine.

Action:

- The capacity of District Focal Points for AWD/Cholera and Flooding was strengthened to report on preparedness, response and gaps by using a standard format, and to provide local knowledge to other WASH agencies on outbreaks as required.

- The Cluster developed WASH/Health Responsibilities Matrix for AWD/Cholera Response to clarify the responsibilities of WASH and Health Clusters in AWD/Cholera preparation, prevention and response, and to avoid overlaps or gaps in the response.

- In collaboration with the WHO Surveillance Unit, a simple weekly update on current AWD/Cholera outbreaks and rumours was put in place. The updates were shared with all WASH Cluster agencies to empower local decision-making and response. Besides, a rumour reporting mechanism encouraged WASH agencies to report possible AWD/cholera outbreaks directly to the WHO Surveillance Unit, copying the National and Zonal WASH Cluster team. This reduced delays in investigation and response, and allowed WHO to give feedback to, or obtain additional information from, the agency who reported.

- To reduce AWD/Cholera outbreaks following flooding events, a flood response guide was developed and empowered agencies to report floods directly to SWALIM (Somalia Water and Land Information Management) Flood Risk and Response Management Information System. It also documented the agreed WASH Cluster flood response process in one page, including responsibilities.

- When numerous key agencies were banned in the South (in November 2011), the Cluster facilitated establishing Regional Supply Hubs, run by local NGOs, for pre-positioning of AWD/Cholera WASH supplies.

- Guidelines were developed to address capacity gaps of WASH members, such as guides on standard latrine design and borehole equipment, and Somalia specific training and material for hygiene promotion.

This wide range of actions and establishment of new structures and networks allowed WASH Cluster practitioners at all levels to get relevant, useful and consistent information and knowledge to continually improve the response.
MANAGING THE PROCESSES OF KNOWLEDGE FLOW

The processes of knowledge flow facilitate the right knowledge reaching the right people at the right time. This enabled the Somalia WASH Cluster to help agencies meet their mandates more quickly and effectively, and therefore better meet the needs of those affected by the emergency.

The Somalia WASH Cluster team was comprised of:

- **National Cluster Team**: Cluster Coordinator, Information Management (IM) Specialist and Support Officer based in Nairobi, with Sub-Zonal WASH Cluster Coordinator based in Mogadishu.

- **Zonal Focal Points**: UNICEF WASH Specialists “double-hatted” in this role as UNICEF is the Cluster lead agency, supporting the Government who led the local Cluster, where present.

- **Regional Focal Points**: Mainly local NGOs democratically elected by their peers and supported with clear roles and responsibilities to fulfil their tasks. Given access issues, regional WASH Cluster meetings rather than zonal meetings were held in the south, and these meetings were led by Regional Focal Points.

- **District Focal Points for AWD / Cholera and Flooding**: Mainly local NGOs.

The approachable personnel at the National level built trusted relationships with sub-national Cluster team members as well as Cluster partners; listening, learning and sharing consistent and useful knowledge to meet expressed needs. The key knowledge flow and interactions in the knowledge management system are highlighted below.

- **a) Development of Strategies, Plans and Standards**
  The Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) drafted **strategic direction** and over-saw the development of **Somalia specific standards and approaches** by Technical Working Groups (TWGs). TWGs were held as locally as possible to best understand the challenges, and have the right people decide on best practice to be recommended to the Cluster. For example, TWGs for standard latrine design, recommended water supply for longer term IDP settlements, and effective chlorination of shallow wells were all held in Mogadishu. A **three-year rolling plan** indicated the long-term challenges and targets of the Cluster to achieve effective sustainable humanitarian WASH action.

  Prior to the finalisation, all the strategies, plans and standards were circulated to Cluster members and presented in the **National Cluster meeting** for comments and endorsement.

- **b) Information and Knowledge Dissemination from National level**
  A dedicated Information Management (IM) Specialist managed the **4W Matrix** who is doing what, where and when) at national level. Training as well as guidelines were provided to support agencies (particularly local NGOs) to complete the matrix. Individual agencies reported their updated 4W matrix via e-mail to the IM Specialist, who collated the data and sent back useful consolidated information to all agencies. Information was generally presented in two ways:

  - **Maps**: The key maps presented the funded and completed interventions, compared to the needs in each region for specific indicators: sustained water interventions, temporary water interventions, sanitation and hygiene. It allowed the Cluster and agencies to visualise at a glance any gaps in funding or where funding needed to be fast tracked. The separate maps for sustained and temporary water were used to indicate the level of interventions building some resilience (e.g. protecting shallow wells) as well as those that would stop providing benefit when the funding finished (e.g. water trucking or water access by voucher).

  (See an example map on the right.)

  - **Simple (pivot) tables**: These tables summarised the target and completed interventions per district, per agency in 1-2 pages. The clear information of “who is doing what, where and when” was shared at sub-national meetings by Regional Focal Points to identify gaps and agree on responding actions. This also served as a basic “verification” of the 4W data, and gave an incentive to those who participated in the process to see their agencies’ work in the table.

  These information products, were also customised for use by specific agencies. It therefore encouraged them to submit data, as they could access it in a useful format for their decision making.

  The Somalia WASH Cluster website was the main channel of information such as the latest strategies, technical guidelines, meeting minutes, response maps and cluster contact lists. Key documents were also disseminated by e-mail to all the Cluster members, and referred at Cluster meetings. The National Cluster team maintained a **common drive**, with organised folder structure, to allow all team members to access to the latest documents and records quickly and easily. The WASH Cluster Document Management guide supported a version control system by standardising the structure of file naming and document referencing.

  In order to enhance the knowledge of WASH Cluster members, **orientation sessions** on WASH Cluster Standards and key documents (e.g. the AWD / Cholera prevention and response plan) were held in Somalia and Nairobi. Pre- and post-tests were used to assess the effectiveness of the sessions. Participants with greater than 80% scores in the post-test received a certificate. The Cluster is currently exploring the potential of a capacity building programme through online training, use of YouTube video and illustration.
For example, in Hundur district in Bakool, the background colour indicates that funded activities meet 11-25% of the needs / target. In other words, more funding is required. Then, the pie chart shows that about 18% of the funded activities have been completed.
c) Information Sharing at sub-national level and Feedback from the Cluster members

On a regular basis, the District Focal Points (FPs) reported on AWD / Cholera and flooding preparedness and response to the National IM Specialist. The information was collated and shared with all Cluster members, based on which they made decisions to address gaps. Following an outbreak, the District FPs facilitated a meeting of local community leaders to best manage the response, encouraging the health representative to lead the meeting. They also reported on any change in needs (e.g. a large increase in IDPs) at their Regional Cluster meetings.

The Regional FPs chaired Regional Cluster meetings where participants reviewed any change in needs, including the information reported by the District FPs, as well as who is working where via the 4W pivot tables, identified gaps, and agreed actions. As per the recommended meeting agenda, members could raise issues (i.e. challenges and achievements) to be presented at the National level. Minutes were sent to the National Cluster team, and uploaded to the WASH Cluster website. The Regional FPs also facilitated the completion of a “snapshot” needs assessment, of which the collated information was shared by the National IM Specialist to all members.

At National Cluster meetings, the reported issues were discussed, as well as any highlights from the Regional Cluster minutes, and the best possible ways to address the issues were agreed amongst the participants.

In these institutionalised reporting and feedback mechanisms between the field and the National level, the Regional FPs played a crucial role. They received the assistance from the Somali speaking WASH Cluster Support Officer to fulfil their tasks.

The agencies could also communicate any feedback or issues via e-mail to the Cluster team or directly discuss with the Cluster Coordinator, or other Cluster team member. The feedback was highly valued by the Cluster team as it allowed them to better respond to the needs of agencies, and subsequently the needs of emergency-affected people.

This knowledge management system enabled field level WASH practitioners to contribute to the system via SAG, TWGs, Sub-National meetings, and individual Cluster members. That is to say, the system was designed to understand and meet practical needs. As a result, it had a clear benefit to users.
Through continual dialogues between the National Cluster and its members, the Somalia WASH Cluster captured new knowledge in a number of “simple, short, relevant and useful” guides for use by field level WASH practitioners. These documents were accessible by all WASH agencies in the country.

**KEY DOCUMENTS**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Key documents</th>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Understand needs</td>
<td>♦ Assessment tools: snapshot and detailed, with a spreadsheet for agencies to collate their own records</td>
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<td>♦ Hold common vision, targets and plans</td>
<td>♦ WASH Cluster 3 year rolling plan&lt;br&gt;♦ Strategy and Standards guide (SOF), including a 1 page Gender guide and 3 page Do No Harm guide&lt;br&gt;♦ AWD/Cholera Prevention, Preparedness and Response Plan&lt;br&gt;♦ Annual Planning Contingency guide for Regional or Zonal Clusters</td>
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<td>♦ Find the latest version of documents quickly and easily</td>
<td>♦ Document Management guide (Internal*)&lt;br&gt;♦ Guide to completing the 4W matrix</td>
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<td>♦ Keep consistent entry</td>
<td>♦ Inclusion criteria for 4W matrix&lt;br&gt;♦ Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) and Cluster Review Committee (CRC) guides&lt;br&gt;♦ Selection criteria for recommending proposals for CAP, CHF and Emergency Reserve Funding (closely linked to agreed Cluster standards)</td>
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<td>♦ Maintain transparency in structure, member selection and fund mobilisation</td>
<td>♦ Annual Team Operational Plan (Internal*), including annual tasks (CAP, CHF, election of SAG/CRC, preparedness etc.) with the responsibility of national team members&lt;br&gt;♦ Cluster team meeting agenda (Internal*)&lt;br&gt;♦ WASH Cluster Performance Evaluation</td>
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<td>♦ Ensure effective coordination by Cluster team</td>
<td>♦ Regional Focal Point guide, including clear responsibilities and recommended agenda&lt;br&gt;♦ District Focal Point guide, including clear responsibilities and simple reporting format for AWD/Cholera and flooding&lt;br&gt;♦ WASH Cluster Terms of Reference</td>
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<td>♦ Empower sub-national focal points and cluster partners to fulfil their responsibilities</td>
<td>♦ Responsibilities Matrix for Cluster and Stakeholders (draft), including the role of Humanitarian Coordinator, Cluster Lead Agency and OCHA (developed by Inter-Cluster Working Group)&lt;br&gt;♦ Inter-Cluster Hygiene Promotion Plan of Action, including standards, indicators and recommended costs&lt;br&gt;♦ Inter-Cluster Matrix: Nutrition / Health / WASH and Education / WASH (adapted to Somalia context from the Global WASH Cluster tool)&lt;br&gt;♦ AWD/Cholera responsibilities matrix: WASH and Health&lt;br&gt;♦ Short Cholera guides in Somali (for teachers, kitchens etc.)&lt;br&gt;♦ Somalia specific Hygiene Promotion training and material</td>
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<td>♦ Enhance information sharing and coordination with other clusters</td>
<td>♦ Minimum technical guidelines for WASH interventions&lt;br&gt;♦ Flood response guide&lt;br&gt;♦ Water Access by Voucher guide&lt;br&gt;♦ Recommended Equipment guide (for boreholes, latrine design, etc.)</td>
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* "Internal" are for the use of WASH Cluster team only
Source: Somalia WASH Cluster website (http://somalia.humanitarianresponse.info/clusters/water-sanitation-hygiene)
Request for the actual documents: wash.cluster.somalia@gmail.com
The effectiveness of the Somalia WASH Cluster knowledge management system was perceived through the Cluster Performance survey conducted in July 2012 with the support of the East & Southern Africa Regional Emergency Cluster Advisor (RECA). The survey received a total of 69 responses (58% from National NGOs). Given the challenging access issues in Somalia, and the acknowledged low capacity of many WASH cluster members, the results showed strong support for the approach.

In emergency response particularly, some people may see a knowledge management system as “a pile of documents” or “a waste of time”. However, these results reflect not only did this approach meet the needs of users, but also the Cluster members perceived the strong leadership in establishing and effectively implementing the approach.

**FEEDBACK FROM THE SYSTEM USERS**

**THE WASH CLUSTER IS USEFUL AND MEETS MY NEEDS**

- 73% agreed that the WASH Cluster was “useful and met my needs” (of which 39% strongly agree)

**CONSOLIDATED INFORMATION CAN BE USED TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS**

- 71% agreed that “consolidated information (maps, gaps, coverage) could be used to make informed decisions” (of which 27% strongly agree)
71% agreed that “there was a mechanism to give feedback to the Cluster” (of which 28% strongly agree)

82% agreed that “the National Cluster Coordinator added value in terms of providing advice and support” (of which 38% strongly agree)

78% agreed that the “quality of leadership of the National Cluster Coordinator was high” (of which 39% strongly agree)
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SOMALIA WASH CLUSTER KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

Facilitate learning between organisations and individuals, and decision making at local level

1 Form the basis of the knowledge management system with inputs from the field. It is pivotal to listen to members and facilitate efficient workshops/meetings to agree standards and recommended good practice. Technical Working Groups (TWGs) were held as locally as possible to best understand the actual challenges, and have the right people decide on the best practice to be recommended by the Cluster. This was then shared across the Cluster.

2 Establish a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) as soon as possible. The SAG was a representative group of WASH experts from UN, Red Crescent/ICRC, International and Local NGOs, including Somalia based technical experts, and reflected the needs and experience of the Cluster partners at all levels. It guided the strategic direction of the WASH Cluster in Somalia. A SAG guide transparently shared the terms of reference (ToR), agreed selection mechanism and initial meeting agendas with the rest of the Cluster members.

Collate agreements and make them easily available to all WASH Cluster members

3 Empower sub-national coordination structures. Decision-making at sub-national level led to a more effective and timely response. This was supported by democratic elections for Regional Focal Points, clear ToRs, a recommended agenda for sub-national cluster meetings, and a feedback mechanism to national (Nairobi) level.

Keep it short and simple (KISS). Somalia specific guidelines, standards and plans were collated into a number of short practical guides, relevant to the target users (i.e. field WASH practitioners). These documents helped all new, existing and remote WASH Cluster members to reduce the need to reinvent the wheel and improve the overall response. Utilisation was kept at the heart of the development of these documents. This also created a transparent operation of the Cluster in its coordination function.

Provide easy access to the latest version of documents and products. Documents should be stored and shared in a manner that facilitates easy access for all. The Cluster website was the main source for many users. The Cluster also effectively used other access/communication points such as email and meetings, as well as a common hard drive for the National Cluster team. Additionally, orientation sessions were organised to enhance the knowledge of Cluster members on the Cluster standards and key documents for the Cluster operation, and encourage the effective use of these.

Share a clear transparent vision and plan, and produce useful products for decision-making

6 Develop a plan to address the key challenges faced by WASH agencies. The Somalia WASH Cluster developed a three-year rolling plan to achieve “effective, sustainable humanitarian WASH action”. The plan formed a transparent platform for advocacy and input into the annual Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) and Cluster direction. It also helped maintain the direction when there was a change in the Cluster Coordinator, or other key personnel within the Cluster.

Use a relatively small set of indicators, linked to specific activities. The Somalia Cluster created a small but sufficient number of indicators to provide a clear picture for decision-making by Cluster partners, for example indicators for temporary water interventions (e.g. water trucking, access by voucher) versus sustained water interventions (e.g. protected shallow wells, and other interventions which can continue to provide safe water after the project finishes, and thereby build community resilience in this chronic humanitarian crisis).

Produce useful products from the 4W (who is working where and when) matrix. The consolidated products must demonstrate the value to agencies to regularly submit 4W information. In Somalia, maps and pivot tables quickly and easily showed the current interventions and gaps compared to the needs, to help partners to make informed decisions. Additionally sharing the summary 4W pivot tables at sub-national WASH Cluster meetings, helped to focus the meetings on joint action, and the peer review process increased the accuracy of agency reporting in areas with limited monitoring due to poor access.

Facilitate continual improvement through feedback and knowledge updates

8 Establish feedback mechanisms. Feedback mechanisms were critical to identify gaps in knowledge and response. The Somalia WASH Cluster institutionalised this in various ways. Firstly, an agenda item in sub-national Cluster meetings was set to identify challenges and achievements to be presented to the National Cluster, then another agenda item in National Cluster meetings to review and address these issues as well as any other highlights from the sub-national meeting minutes. Other feedback mechanisms included group or individual meetings, correspondence with National Cluster team members, SAG or TWGs, and District Focal Points for AWD/Cholera and flooding reporting in standard format on gaps in preparation, prevention and response. In addition, the Cluster performance survey served as an overarching feedback mechanism and assessed to what extent the Cluster has met its member needs.

Regularly review and update guides. In the constantly changing nature of emergency, the management system needs to be kept up-to-date with new, and step improvements, in knowledge. In other words, the WASH Cluster team should monitor how standards, guidelines and other tools are being used on a regular basis, and improve on the content, format and/or accessibility, as necessary. A simple system for version control of hard and soft copies of documents allowed the Cluster members to find the latest version quickly and easily.
CONCLUSION

The experience of the Somalia WASH Cluster demonstrates the importance of knowledge management in ensuring greater predictability and accountability in humanitarian response, while at the same time strengthening partnerships.

All members of the Somalia WASH Cluster were involved in developing the knowledge management system and contributed to the continuous improvement in response. The survey results indicated that the system was useful at all levels.

Drawing on the lessons learned in Somalia, it is recommended that a knowledge management system be implemented in all national WASH Clusters. Practical knowledge management provides information, support and clarity to field level WASH practitioners, and enhances the impact and effectiveness of humanitarian response.

For the request of further information and actual documents presented in this paper, please contact the WASH Somalia Cluster through wash.cluster.somalia@gmail.com.