Leading Humanitarian Relief
Introduction

On February 6th, 2023, two devastating earthquakes shook Turkey and Syria, leaving countless buildings in ruins. Among the wreckage was Mesut Hanver, a father whose world was turned upside down in an instant. He clung to the hand of his 15-year-old daughter, trapped beneath the rubble of what was once their home (Exhibit 1). Her hand was the only part of her he could reach.

This catastrophic event struck unexpectedly at 4:17am, catching millions of people off guard while they were still in their beds. The first earthquake had a magnitude of Mw7.8 struck 37 km west-northwest of Gaziantep. It was followed by a Mw 7.7 earthquake later the same day. The confirmed death toll stood at 59,259: 50,783 in Turkey and 8,476 in Syria. It is the deadliest earthquake in what is now present-day Turkey since the 526 Antioch earthquake and the deadliest natural disaster in its modern history.

The earthquake led to an unbearable loss of life and injuries across the region. There were more than 30,000 aftershocks in the three months that followed. Millions of homeless and unsheltered kept looking for their loved ones buried in the damage. Basic necessities like food and water were scarce, and the survivors found themselves battling hunger and thirst. The nights brought with them freezing temperatures, and without proper shelter or warm clothing, many were left shivering in the cold. The earthquake had not only destroyed their homes but also tested their spirits. Roads, airports, ports and other infrastructure have sustained heavy damage.

In response to this precarious situation, more than 105 countries offered aid, and hundreds of humanitarian organizations from all over the world traveled to Turkey to help on the ground. Their help is urgently needed. Yet, coordinating their efforts remains a challenge.

In this case study, you will play the role a humanitarian field agent. Your task is to join in the coordination efforts and address the needs of the earthquakes’ victims in the region.

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The case is based on generalized information. It is written to provide material for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation.

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Coordination Challenges in Humanitarian Operations

Coordination is one of the key challenges in humanitarian operations. Imagine the Red Cross using their trucks to bring blankets and sanitation items to a camp in Turkey and only upon arrival realizing that the Médecins Sans Frontières had already provided for these. Such a scenario would result in valuable, yet scarce resources being wasted. Unfortunately, these scenarios are not uncommon and pose a sad example of how resources are getting wasted in relief operations.

The issue is rooted in the fact that the humanitarian sector is chronically under-funded while the demand for humanitarian aid continues to rise (Exhibit 2). The scarce funding for the humanitarian sector makes coordination difficult for humanitarian organizations because humanitarian organizations tend not to share valuable information and resources with each other to sustain their competitive edge. The simultaneous cooperation for disaster response and competition over scarce resources pose a barrier to successful coordination. To avert coordination failures, the United Nations created the cluster system.

United Nations’ Logistics Cluster (LogCluster)

To improve coordination, the Inter Agency Standing Committee in the United Nations (UN) initiated the “cluster approach” in 2005. A cluster refers to a collection of humanitarian entities operating within a specific realm of humanitarian activities, such as shelter, health, or logistics. Each cluster designates one or two lead organizations, with at least one of them being a UN entity, primarily for funding considerations. The activation of clusters occurs in response to a formal request from the host government, typically when the demands surpass the national governments’ response and coordination capabilities. A central section is constituted by the Logistics Cluster (LogCluster), as it functions for a service provider for all the other sections. The LogCluster Team can be directly involved in a disaster zone on site and has four main tasks during a response:

- **Strategic response planning**: The LogCluster conducts logistics assessments for strategic planning and funding appeals. Strategic response planning includes evaluating needs for storage units, airlift resources, road transportation routes, and convoys.

- **Coordination**: The LogCluster coordinates key stakeholders, including national authorities, UN agencies, NGOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The LogCluster promotes resource efficiency and cooperation to avoid duplication, pooling transportation and storage needs, and matching them with available resources across the humanitarian supply chain. The main coordination event across organizations happens at the cluster meetings. These meetings summon the representatives from humanitarian organizations of different sizes and foci in the field to discuss and exchange information, materials, and resources with each other.
• **Information management**: The LogCluster’s officers facilitate efficient communication for disaster response and filter relevant information, often collected during preparedness assessments. Information is shared through meetings and online resources.

• **Common service provision and provider of last resort**: When there’s a severe shortage of logistics resources, the cluster lead becomes the ‘provider of last resort.’ This entails securing essential assets, often funded by donors, including storage, flights, vehicles, and fuel, which may require international sourcing when local resources are insufficient.

The UN’s World Food Program serves as the cluster lead and hosts the meetings on global and field level. The lead is a powerful organization with vast expertise and material resources in the field of logistics. It coordinates the resource exchange between cluster members, coordinates their efforts.

Having clusters and cluster leads lays the foundations to a more structured and unified disaster response. Whenever and wherever a disaster strikes, the LogCluster gets activated and organizes regular voluntary meetings where actors from different humanitarian organizations (local and international) come together. As such, it also got recently activated in Turkey after the earthquake. The response has triggered international assistance from many countries, including 26 search and rescue teams that have so far been deployed. Cluster teams are on their way with staff deployments to field operations.

**You are invited to the cluster meeting**

A big cluster meeting at the onset of the response is planned on February 10, 2023 in Gaziantep, Turkey. You need to prepare accordingly, faced with overwhelming needs and time pressure to act swiftly upon very limited information and funding. Please receive the information from your instructor regarding which organization you are working for and how to prepare for the meeting.
Exhibit 1: Photo of Mesut Hancer holding to his 15-year-old daughter, Irmak’s hand who died under the rubble. Photo is taken by Adem Altan (AFP)
Exhibit 2: Funding gap in the humanitarian section reported by the Financial Tracking Service of the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

**Funding gap (2012-2020)**

- Requirements (US$)
- Funding (US$)

Source: [https://fts.unocha.org/home/2023/donors/view](https://fts.unocha.org/home/2023/donors/view)
Exhibit 3: The United Nation’s Cluster System

Source: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/what-cluster-approach