

**OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE**  
**GENERIC TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR CLUSTER**  
**COORDINATORS AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL**

**Background**

In countries facing major new or on-going complex and/or natural humanitarian emergencies, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) or Resident Coordinator (RC) where there is no HC, in consultation with the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)<sup>1</sup>, is responsible for designating Cluster Lead Agencies for all key humanitarian response sectors and for consulting with the Emergency Relief Coordinator to ensure that there is IASC agreement to the proposed arrangements<sup>2</sup>. If there is an OCHA Field Office, The RC/HC will be supported in this endeavour by OCHA.

At the country level the Country Director/Representative of the agency/organization designated as Cluster Lead/Co-Lead Agency is ultimately accountable to the RC/HC for ensuring that cluster leadership activities are carried out effectively.<sup>3</sup> To this end, Cluster Lead/Co-Lead Agencies at the country level are responsible for appointing individuals with the appropriate seniority, skills and competencies required to promote strategic and action-orientated cluster coordination. During periods when the level of cluster coordination-related activities are particularly high, for example in the aftermath of a sudden-onset emergency, it is preferable to appoint a dedicated, full-time Cluster Coordinator with no other programme responsibilities. Having a dedicated Cluster Coordinator also helps avoid any perceptions (real or perceived) of agency bias. It is the responsibility of the Cluster Lead Agency at the country level to ensure that Cluster Coordinators have the technical and human resources required to fulfil these Terms of Reference (TORs), for example through the deployment/formation of a cluster coordination team.

In cases where a decision is made to designate Cluster Co-Lead Agencies at the country level, it is the responsibility of the RC/HC and the Cluster Co-Lead Agencies to draw up a Memorandum of Understanding or equivalent document, clearly reflecting the agreed Cluster Co-Lead coordination arrangements. This should include agreement on reporting lines for Cluster Coordinators.

**Terms of Reference**

The Cluster Coordinator responsibilities outlined below have been developed from the *Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level*<sup>4</sup> and from existing TORs for the Cluster Coordinators of specific clusters. It can be assumed throughout that where the Cluster Coordinator is supported by a coordination team, relevant sections of the TORs refer to the team members.

In general, the Cluster Coordinator enables cluster partners to respond more effectively to the needs of the affected population than they could do individually by working together in a coordinated manner and in accordance with the Principles of Partnership<sup>5</sup>. The Cluster Coordinator provides leadership and works on behalf of the cluster as a whole, facilitating all cluster activities and developing and maintaining a strategic vision and operational response plan. He/she also ensures coordination with other clusters in relation to inter-cluster activities and cross-cutting issues.

The Cluster Coordinator reports directly to the Country Director/Representative of the Cluster Lead Agency/s. However, the Cluster Coordinator has an over-riding duty to all partners within the cluster, to act as a representative of the cluster as a whole rather than solely as a representative of his/her particular agency<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> IASC Guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams, November 2009.

<sup>2</sup> IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response, November 2006, and IASC Operational Guidance on Designating Sector/Cluster Leads in Ongoing Emergencies, and in Major New Emergencies, May 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Annex 1 to the IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response, November 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> The Principles of Partnership are equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity, as endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform, July 2007.

<sup>6</sup> IASC Joint letter from Cluster Lead Agencies to their Directors/Representatives at Country Level, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

*The Cluster Coordinator is responsible for facilitating a process at the sectoral level aimed at ensuring the following:*

### **Establishment and maintenance of effective coordination mechanisms**

- Ensure appropriate coordination with national authorities to the extent the political situation allows. This will involve liaising and working with relevant government counterparts to support or complement existing coordination mechanisms, where they exist. The Cluster Coordinator will either represent the cluster at sectoral meetings led by national authorities or co-chair cluster meetings with national authorities as appropriate.
- Identify and establish contact with all other relevant sector stakeholders including national and international organizations, and representatives of affected populations. Invite these stakeholders to participate as partners in the work of the cluster as appropriate.
- Convene and facilitate meetings of the cluster (and/or joint meetings with another cluster), increasing or reducing their frequency as needed but being careful to avoid meeting overload. Ensure that cluster meetings are well-managed and action and results-oriented, with decisions clearly communicated to relevant cluster partners and stakeholders. Ensure that meetings are managed in line with the Principles of Partnership.
- Facilitate agreement on an efficient division of labour and the assignment of responsibilities amongst cluster partners which takes account of their comparative advantages and complementarities. Designate focal points or working groups for specific issues where necessary<sup>7</sup>.
- Support OCHA to establish and maintain appropriate inter-cluster coordination mechanisms. Represent the cluster in inter-cluster coordination fora as appropriate.
- Work with the Country Director/Representative of the Cluster Lead Agency/s to ensure that arrangements are made to allow for a proper hand-over of Cluster Coordinator responsibilities at the end of a Coordinator's assignment, to ensure there is continuity and that institutional memory is maintained for the cluster as a whole.

### **Preparedness and capacity-development (including, where possible, in the pre-emergency and post-emergency phase)**

- If the situation allows, lead early warning, contingency planning, and emergency preparedness efforts for the cluster; ensure adequate cluster participation in inter-cluster early warning, contingency planning and emergency preparedness activities.
- Together with cluster partners, undertake capacity mapping and gap identification exercises to develop a capacity-development strategy for the sector.
- Identify the training needs of cluster partners and communicate them to the Country Director/Representative of the Cluster Lead Agency/s.

### **Needs assessment, analysis, prioritization and planning**

- Ensure that the cluster covers all the identified and evolving sector needs of the affected population, and not only those that relate to the specific mandate of individual cluster members, including that of the Cluster Lead Agency/s.
- Organise joint field missions, needs assessments and analysis among cluster partners and participate in joint inter-cluster needs assessment exercises as appropriate to ensure that identified needs, gaps and priorities are as evidence-based as possible in any given emergency context.

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of the protection cluster, Focal Point Agencies are responsible for specific technical areas and at the country level the Protection Cluster may put in place similar arrangements, where appropriate.

- Facilitate the development of an overall strategy and response plan for the cluster with linkages between disaster risk reduction, relief, recovery and development. To the extent possible, ensure the strategy complements government policies and plans.
- Ensure that the response plan of the cluster is updated regularly according to evolving needs and that it establishes indicators by which performance of the cluster can be measured.
- Ensure that cluster strategies are adequately reflected in overall country strategies such as the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) as well as in Flash and Consolidated Appeals.
- In terms of inter-cluster coordination, identify issues of mutual interest and identify information which (i) should be proactively shared with other clusters, and (ii) should be acquired from other clusters to ensure a more effective overall response. Identify potential areas of duplication between clusters so that they can be avoided, and identify potential gaps which may fall between clusters so that they can be addressed through the clear assignment of responsibilities.
- Inform the Country Director/Representative of the Cluster Lead Agency of any critical gaps in the response that cannot be covered by any cluster partners and that require the Cluster Lead Agency to intervene as Provider of Last Resort; advocate for the Cluster Lead Agency to take the necessary action in its capacity as Provider of Last Resort<sup>8</sup>.
- Advocate for the use of participatory and community-based approaches in the planning and implementation of projects. Promote measures which increase accountability to affected populations and promote the identification of durable solutions.

### **Transition planning**

- Depending on the specific country situation, lead on the design of appropriate transition strategies for the cluster to ensure continuity between the humanitarian response, recovery and development phases<sup>9</sup> and disaster risk reduction initiatives. Ideally this will involve working closely with national counterparts and development actors to ensure a resumption of national ownership of cluster activities. It will also involve consideration of how coordination mechanisms and cluster membership should change as the humanitarian emergency subsides.

### **Integration of cross-cutting issues**

- Raise awareness of and promote the integration of agreed priority cross-cutting issues (e.g. age, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights) in cluster/inter-cluster needs assessments, analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring. Work with cross-cutting issue focal points (if they have been designated) or, if necessary, call upon global cross-cutting issue focal points to support the effective mainstreaming of these issues within the response.

### **Application of standards, guidelines and good practice**

- Facilitate discussion and agreement on the use of common standards and tools among cluster partners. Promote awareness of and adherence to relevant policy guidelines, codes of conduct and examples of good practice by all cluster partners, taking into consideration the possible need for local adaptation both in terms of language and content.
- Ensure to the extent possible that cluster partners use common standards and tools for information collection/sharing and data management, including in needs assessments and monitoring (while respecting principles of confidentiality and protection concerns).
- Ensure that cluster partners are aware of relevant commitments that the Government has made under international human rights and humanitarian law and promote a response which is in line with

<sup>8</sup> IASC Operational Guidance on the concept of 'Provider of Last Resort', June 2008. This does not apply to IFRC.

<sup>9</sup> More detailed guidance on the transition of humanitarian architecture is currently being developed.

these commitments.

### **Information management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting**

- Facilitate adequate reporting and information sharing, both within the cluster and with other clusters through inter-cluster coordination mechanisms. This will involve contact list management and collecting 3 or 4W information (Who/What/When/Where) from partners and ensuring it is shared with the inter-agency coordination body so that it can be processed and redistributed at the cluster level and to other stakeholders.
- Ensure that updated and relevant cluster-specific information is included in general inter-cluster reporting including common web platforms, Situation Reports and other reporting mechanisms.
- Facilitate cluster agreement on what monitoring activities will be undertaken to review the impact of the sector's humanitarian response and ensure they are implemented. Make adjustments to the overall strategy and programming as appropriate. Regularly review the functioning of the cluster and encourage an atmosphere conducive to raising and addressing concerns.
- Help facilitate real time evaluations.

### **Advocacy**

- Together with cluster partners, identify core advocacy concerns for the sector and contribute key messages to the broader advocacy initiatives of the HC, the Cluster Lead Agency and other relevant actors. Where appropriate, develop a joint cluster/ inter-cluster advocacy initiative to raise the profile and needs of the cluster among in-country humanitarian donors. Encourage all cluster partners to include common/sector-wide issues, concerns and messages in their own communication activities.

### **Resource Mobilisation**

- Following thorough and transparent consultation within the cluster, provide leadership and strategic direction in the assessment and prioritisation of project proposals and common funding criteria for inclusion in Consolidated Appeals, Flash Appeals, CERF and ERF requests and other inter-agency funding appeals; ensure that agreed cluster strategies and priorities are adequately reflected in appeal documents. Ensure the implementation of the gender marker in appeals.
- In line with any agreed guidance for inter-agency funding appeals, establish mechanisms for accountable and transparent financial resource allocation within the cluster. Where possible work at the inter-cluster level to promote coherence amongst clusters.

*Developed through Global Cluster Coordination Group*