Humanitarian Reform and the Global Cluster Approach

1. The Humanitarian Reform

Humanitarian reform seeks to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. It is an ambitious effort by the international humanitarian community to reach more beneficiaries, with more comprehensive needs-based relief and protection, in a more effective and timely manner.

The ad hoc, unpredictable nature of many international responses to humanitarian emergencies prompted the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in 2005 to launch an independent Humanitarian Response Review of the global humanitarian system. The review assessed the humanitarian response capacities of the UN, NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other key humanitarian actors including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to identify critical gap areas and to make recommendations to address them.

Following the recommendations of the review, the cluster approach was proposed as a way of addressing gaps and strengthening the effectiveness of humanitarian response through building partnerships. Moreover the cluster approach ensures predictability and accountability in international responses to humanitarian emergencies, by clarifying the division of labour among organizations, and better defining their roles and responsibilities within the different sectors of the response. It is about making the international humanitarian community more structured, accountable and professional, so that it can be a better partner for host governments, local authorities and local civil society.

2. The Cluster Approach

Aim

The Cluster Approach aims to strengthen overall response capacity as well as the effectiveness of the response in five key ways:

- First, the approach aims to ensure sufficient global capacity is built up and maintained in all the main sectors/areas of response, with a view to ensuring timely and effective responses in new crises.

- Second, the approach ensures predictable leadership in all the main sectors/areas of response. Cluster leads are responsible for ensuring response capacity is in place and that assessment, planning and response activities are carried out in collaboration with partners and in accordance with agreed standards and guidelines. Cluster leads also act as the “provider of last resort”.

- Third, the approach is designed around the concept of partnerships (i.e. clusters) between UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, international organizations and NGOs. Partners work together towards agreed common humanitarian objectives both at the global level (preparedness, standards, tools, stockpiles and capacity-building) and at the field level (assessment, planning, delivery and monitoring). By designating cluster leads, the aim is to make the international humanitarian community a better partner for host governments, local authorities and local civil society, and to avoid situations were governments have to deal with hundreds of uncoordinated international actors.

- Fourth, the approach strengthens accountability. Cluster leads are accountable, at the global level, to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) for building up a more predictable and effective response capacity in line with IASC agreements. At the field level, in addition to their normal institutional responsibilities, cluster leads are accountable to Humanitarian Coordinators for fulfilling agreed roles and responsibilities.
for Cluster leadership, such as those listed in the IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level. The approach also strengthens accountability to beneficiaries through commitments to participatory and community-based approaches, improved common needs assessments and prioritization, and better monitoring and evaluation.

- Fifth, the approach should help to improve strategic field-level coordination and prioritization in specific sectors/areas of response by placing responsibility for leadership and coordination of these issues with the competent operational agency.

Note: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has stated that its position on the cluster approach is the following: “Among the components of the Movement, the ICRC is not taking part in the cluster approach. Nevertheless, coordination between the ICRC and the UN will continue to the extent necessary to achieve efficient operational complementarity and a strengthened response for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. At the global level, the ICRC participates as an observer in many of the cluster working group meetings.

When is the Cluster Approach Used?

If major “new” emergency requires a multi-sectoral response with participation of a wide range of international humanitarian actors, the cluster approach should be used from the start to plan and organize the international response. For new emergencies the activation procedure should be followed, which entails the following:

- The humanitarian coordinator (HC) or resident coordinator (RC) consults relevant partners;
- He/she proposes leads for each major area and sends a proposal to Emergency Response Coordinator (ERC);
- ERC shares proposal with Global Cluster Leads;
- ERC ensures agreement at global level and communicates agreement to HC/RC and partners within 24 hours of receiving the proposal;
- HC/RC informs host government and all partners.

During on-going emergencies, it has been endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in late 2006, that all countries with Humanitarian Coordinators will implement the cluster approach.

A "Diagnostic Tool" to steer the progress and ensure that the next phase of humanitarian reform is a field driven process has been developed. The tool aims to assist Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) to determine the support needed to use the approach and to establish a plan and timeframe for doing so.

The tool is based on lessons learned from the IASC Interim Self-Assessment of the Cluster Approach, conducted in autumn 2006. Taking these lessons into consideration should ensure that HCTs using the approach in 2007 (a) understand the operational purpose and modalities of the cluster approach, (b) clearly identify roles and responsibilities, response capacity and operational gaps, (c) ensure that adequate coordination structures are in place, and (d) develop targets against which progress can be measured.

The Diagnostic Tool is designed to assist Humanitarian Coordinators in guiding discussions with HCT partners on how to proceed with planning for and using the cluster approach. Completing the diagnostic analysis should not require a heavy process. Most of the information required should be readily available in existing documents (e.g. CHAP, UNDAF, RC Annual Report, notes from meetings, etc.).

Upon completion of the exercise the HCT should have consensus on (a) the current state of response capacity (and response gaps) and coordination mechanisms in country and how this compares to the "standards" of leadership, partnership, predictability and accountability of the cluster approach as outlined in the Guidance Note, (b) a bullet-point list of the “next steps” to be taken by the
Humanitarian CT to use the cluster approach (with key targets and timeframe) and (c) a bullet point list of the external support that is needed to begin (e.g. guidance notes, advice needed, issues that require further clarification, targeted training)

3. The Global Cluster Leads

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has designated global cluster leads in eleven areas of humanitarian activity. Click here to see the list of global cluster leads.

In December 2005 the IASC Principals designated global cluster leads (see below) for nine sectors or areas of activity which in the past either lacked predictable leadership in situations of humanitarian emergency, or where there was considered to be a need to strengthen leadership and partnership with other humanitarian actors. This complemented those sectors and categories of population where leadership and accountability was already clear, e.g. agriculture (led by FAO), logistics (led by WFP), refugees (led by UNHCR) and education, led by UNICEF. In the mean time, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has designated global cluster leads in eleven areas of humanitarian activity:

Cluster Lead Agencies

Sector/Cluster lead agencies are accountable to the HC for facilitating a process at the sectoral level aimed at ensuring:

- Inclusion of key humanitarian partners
- Establishment of appropriate coordination mechanisms
- Coordination with national/local authorities, local civil society, etc.
- Participatory and community-based approaches
- Attention to priority cross-cutting issues
- Needs assessment and analysis
- Emergency preparedness
- Planning and strategy development
- Application of standards
- Monitoring and reporting
- Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Training and capacity building
- Provision of assistance and services as a last resort

The Global Cluster Lead ToRs

The global cluster leads, together with their partners, provide the following types of support to strengthen field response:

- Technical surge capacity (e.g. camp management and coordination staff, early recovery advisors, Logistics Response Teams, Health Emergency and Assessment Response Teams);
- Trained experts to lead cluster coordination at the field level;
- Increased stockpiles, some pre-positioned within regions (e.g. emergency shelter materials);
- Standardised technical tools, including for information management;
- Agreement on common methods and formats for needs assessments, monitoring, and benchmarking; and
- Best practices and lessons learned from field-tests.

Click here for IASC Cluster/Sector Lead Terms of Reference.
Terminology

The following definitions were agreed by the IASC Working Group:

GLOBAL CLUSTER LEAD AGENCIES: this is an agency/organization at global level that has been designated by the IASC as cluster lead agency for a particular sector.

CLUSTER LEAD AGENCY (Country Level): this is an agency or organization that has been designated by the Resident and/or Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) as cluster lead agency for a particular sector at the country level, following consultations with the Humanitarian Country Team. (A cluster lead agency at the country level need not necessarily be the same agency/organization as the Global Cluster Lead Agency for that sector).

GLOBAL CLUSTER COORDINATOR: This is a person who has been designated as global cluster coordinator by the Global Cluster Lead Agency. This person is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and facilitation of the work of global cluster.

CLUSTER COORDINATOR (Country Level): this is a person who has been designate as cluster coordinator by the cluster lead agency at the country level. This person is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and facilitation of the work of the cluster.

Links with governments

A key responsibility of sector leads at the country level is to ensure that humanitarian actors build on local capacities and that they develop and maintain appropriate links with Government and local authorities. State institutions, local civil society and other stakeholders. The nature of these links will depend on the situation in each country and on the willingness and capacity of each of these actors to lead or participate in humanitarian activities.

In some cases, Government and local authorities may be in a strong position to lead the overall humanitarian response and the role of the Humanitarian Coordinator may be to organize an international humanitarian response in support of the host Government's efforts. This would typically be the case in disasters. In other cases, particularly in situations of ongoing conflict, the willingness or capacity of a Government or a State institutions to lead or contribute to humanitarian activities may be compromised, and this will clearly influence the nature of the relationships which it establishes with international humanitarian actors.

‘Each state has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory’ GA Resolution 46/182.

Building Global Humanitarian Response Capacity


The Appeal for Building Global Humanitarian Response Capacity (April 2007 - March 2008) consolidated the budgets for eleven clusters/sectors’ global-level capacity building requirements for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. Field-level costs associated with implementing the approach have been/will be incorporated into revisions of Consolidated Appeals and into Flash Appeals for new emergencies.

The resources identified in the Appeal include the priority requirements needed to address capacity gaps, which cannot be covered by existing or previously mobilised resources. Activities/projects
included in the Appeal cover global-level capacity-building to address response capacity gaps of the following type:

- Trained, deployable staff/surge capacity;
- Adequate commonly-accessible stockpiles;
- Agreed standards, guidelines, frameworks, systems, and tools.

For more information: www.oneresponse.info

- individual cluster/sector specific web pages
  (http://oneresponse.info/Coordination/ClusterApproach/Pages/Cluster%20Approach.aspx)