CLUSTER
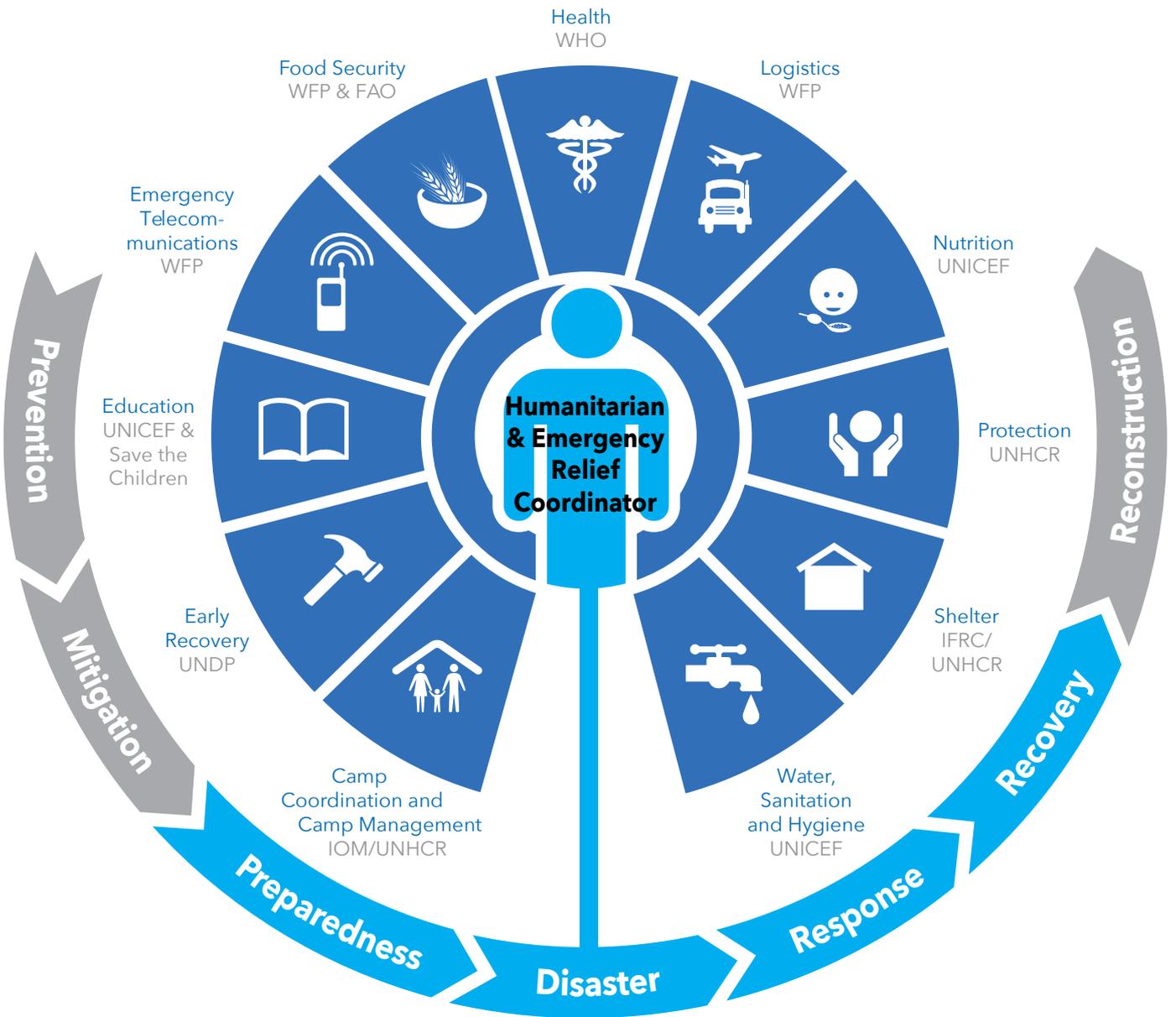
REFERENCE MODULE FOR **CLUSTER COORDINATION** AT COUNTRY LEVEL REVISED JULY 2015

IASC
Inter-Agency Standing Committee

Health
WHO

Food Security
WFP & FAO

Logistics
WFP

Emergency
Telecom-
munications
WFP

Nutrition
UNICEF

Education
UNICEF &
Save the
Children

Protection
UNHCR

Early
Recovery
UNDP

Shelter
IFRC/
UNHCR

Camp
Coordination and
Camp Management
IOM/UNHCR

Water,
Sanitation
and Hygiene
UNICEF

Humanitarian
& Emergency
Relief
Coordinator

Prevention

Mitigation

Preparedness

Disaster

Response

Recovery

Reconstruction

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- The cluster approach was adopted in 2005, following an independent Humanitarian Response Review, to address gaps and to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian response by building partnerships. It ensures that international responses to humanitarian emergencies are predictable and accountable and have clear leadership by making clearer the division of labour between organizations, and their roles and responsibilities in different areas. It aims to make the international humanitarian community better organized and more accountable and professional, so that it can be a better partner for affected people, host Governments, local authorities, local civil society and resourcing partners.

- The cluster approach is not the only humanitarian coordination solution. In some cases, it may coexist with other forms of national or international coordination, and its application must take into account the specific needs of a country and the context. Using a cluster approach in every emergency might waste resources and impede action by Governments, which are primarily responsible for providing humanitarian assistance to people under their jurisdiction.

- This module has been revised, reflecting implementation of the 2011 Transformative Agenda, and includes inputs from the field and the global level. Two new chapters, on Clusters and Sectors, and on the Role of Clusters in Preparedness, have been added. Three chapters have been significantly updated: Transition and De-activation of Clusters; Inter-Cluster Coordination; and Cluster Coordination Monitoring. Learning and case studies gathered on the components of the module will be available at http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters.

In December 2011, the IASC Principals agreed to a set of actions under the IASC Transformative Agenda to improve humanitarian response, building on the 2005 Humanitarian Reform. The reforms are aimed at simplifying processes and mechanisms, improving inter-agency communication and collaboration, and building confidence in the system as a whole, from the immediate response to longer-term planning. Under the Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals committed to the ultimate objective of accountability to affected people[1] by ensuring that humanitarian responses deliver assistance to those in need as the result of effective and timely decision-making and planning.

The IASC Transformative Agenda noted that the application of the cluster approach had become overly process-driven and, in some situations, perceived to potentially undermine rather than enable delivery. It states that clusters will be stripped back to become lean, effective and efficient coordination mechanisms, focusing on delivery of results, rather than process. Specific clusters will only be activated following a determination of need by the HC and HCT. Their relevance will be assessed on an annual basis, ensuring that they remain active only where they add value. Humanitarian partners will work together to enhance the efficacy of clusters by sharing leadership responsibilities at the sub-national level where appropriate and feasible, engaging in joint activities, such as contingency planning and assessment missions, and reallocating resources from the national to the sub-national level. Clusters will be professionally managed by dedicated, trained and experienced Cluster Coordinators and their meetings will focus on strategy, planning and results, rather than exclusively on information-sharing or fund distribution. Meetings will be held on a need-only basis and, where appropriate, jointly with other clusters to enhance cross-cluster synergies and reduce demands on time. Efforts will also be made to improve overall inter-cluster coordination. Information management will be prioritized and resources will be pooled in order to enhance the collection and analysis of data on the progress and impact of cluster activities. International coordination mechanisms, represent the most appropriate coordination solution, be adapted to the operational context and should support national coordination efforts[2].

This Cluster Coordination Reference Module is one of the IASC Transformative Agenda Protocols. It outlines the basic elements of cluster coordination and intends to serve as a reference guide for field practitioners to help facilitate their work and improve humanitarian outcomes[3]. Additional learning on themes covered in this module are available online[4].

Cluster coordination and the IASC Transformative Agenda

Using clusters effectively

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1   The IASC Operational Framework on Accountability to Affected Populations describes how organizations should ensure participation, information provision, feedback, and complaint handling with affected people at country level and can be found online at: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx/page=content-subsidi-common-default&sb=89.
2   See IASC, *Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities*, July 2011.
3   The Global Protection Cluster includes subsidiary coordination bodies called Areas of Responsibility (AoRs), which may be replicated at field level as required (as sub-clusters). These sub-clusters have designated lead agencies which have equivalent responsibilities to cluster lead agencies in their area of responsibility. Thus, much of the guidance in this reference module also applies to AoRs present in the context.
4   At: http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination.

Section 1

Cluster and Sector Coordination

The principal objective of international humanitarian action, and the purpose of coordination, is to meet the needs of affected people by means that are reliable, effective, inclusive, and respect humanitarian principles[5].

This module focusses on the role of **IASC clusters that are** *formally activated* in the context of emergencies. However, many of the same principles can be applied in support of Government-led emergency or crisis sectoral coordination mechanisms. The module does not examine development coordination or emergency coordination in general.

IASC clusters and Government-led emergency or crisis sectoral coordination mechanisms can be defined as follows:

IASC clusters are formally activated clusters[6] created when existing coordination mechanisms are overwhelmed or constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles[7].

A formally activated cluster has specific characteristics and accountabilities.[8] It is accountable to the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) through the Cluster Lead Agency (CLA) as well as to national authorities and to people affected by the crisis. IASC clusters are a temporary coordination solution and efforts should be made as soon as appropriate and possible to hand over coordination to the relevant authorities.

Government-led emergency or crisis sectoral coordination mechanisms report to designated Government bodies. The lifespan of emergency sector coordination is defined by Government policies or declarations. International humanitarian support can augment national capacity, underpinned by the principles of the cluster approach.

The table below compares cluster coordination in different settings:

COORDINATION MECHANISM	EMERGENCY PHASE	RECOVERY PHASE
Government coordination capacity is adequate and not constrained	Government provides leadership. International partners may reinforce the Government's coordination capacity.	Government leadership continues. Humanitarian coordination structures may transition to recovery and to development structures. Inter-national actors withdraw or support recovery, and help to prepare for future crises.
Government coordination capacity is limited or constrained	Clusters are activated where needed. Where appropriate and possible, co-leadership with Government bodies and NGO partners is strongly encouraged.	Clusters are de-activated or devolve to national emergency or recovery and development coordination structures, where appropriate and possible. Government coordination is strengthened, where appropriate and possible.

Defining cluster and emergency sectoral coordination

The life-cycle of cluster- and sector-coordination mechanisms

5   For Accountability to Affected Populations, see: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-common-default&sb=89. For humanitarian principles, see: https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.Pdf; https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf; and: http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf.
6   Clusters should be activated in accordance with the procedures described in Section 2 on Cluster Activation.
7   Mechanisms are "overwhelmed" when current structures can no longer manage due to the scale of need, number of actors involved, adoption of a more complex multi-sectoral approach is necessary. A Government is 'constrained' when it is unable or unwilling to act (for example, because it is itself party to a conflict).
8   See Section 2 on Cluster Activation.

A decision to activate clusters may be made when a Government's capacity to coordinate is limited or constrained. However, extra international coordination capacity may be valuable even when a Government is able to lead and coordinate a response[9].Clusters are activated as part of an international emergency response, based on an analysis of humanitarian need, existing coordination mechanisms and capacity on the ground.

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Note on refugee and 'mixed situation' operations: *The Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice* clarifies leadership and coordination arrangements in the situation where a complex humanitarian emergency or natural disaster is taking place, a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed, and a UNHCR-led refugee operation is also underway. The Note sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the UNHCR Representative and the HC, and the practical interaction of IASC coordination and UNHCR's refugee coordination arrangements, to ensure that coordination is streamlined, complementary and mutually reinforcing[10].

9   For a comparison of the roles and responsibilities of activated IASC clusters and Government-led sectoral emergency coordination, see Annex I.
10   The Joint Note can be found at: http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/joint-unhcr-ocha-note-mixed-situations-coordination-practice

Section 2

Cluster Activation

Under the Transformative Agenda, IASC Principals agreed that activation of clusters must be more **strategic, less automatic, and time limited**. HCs should only recommend the activation of clusters when there is an identified gap in the enabling environment warranting their activation. Formal activation of clusters may be difficult in circumstances where Government capacity is constrained.[11] In such contexts, different ways of augmenting coordination and response capacity may need to be found, underpinned by the principles of the cluster approach.

To ensure that clusters continue to operate only while they are strictly needed, plans to deactivate and transition clusters should be prepared as soon as possible after activation (see section 11). Building the capacity of local partners and Government should be an objective from the outset.

Criteria for cluster activation

The criteria for cluster activation are met when:

1. Response and coordination gaps exist due to a sharp deterioration or significant change in the humanitarian situation.

2. Existing national response or coordination capacity is unable to meet needs in a manner that respects humanitarian principles,[12] due to the scale of need, the number of actors involved, the need for a more complex multi-sectoral approach, or other constraints on the ability to respond or apply humanitarian principles).

Activation procedures

The procedure for activating a cluster or clusters is as follows:

1. The RC/HC and Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs), supported by OCHA, consult national authorities to establish what humanitarian coordination mechanisms exist, and their respective capacities.[13]

2. Global CLAs are alerted by their country representatives and OCHA, prior to the UNCT/HCT meeting to discuss activation, to ensure they are represented at the meeting.

3. The RC/HC, in consultation with the UNCT/HCT, determines which clusters should be recommended for activation, assisted by analysis of the situation and preparedness planning.[14] In each case, the decision should be based on the criteria above.

4. The RC/HC, in consultation with the UNCT/HCT, selects CLAs based on agencies' coordination and response capacity, operational presence, and ability to scale up. The selection of CLAs ideally mirrors global arrangements; but this is not always possible and sometimes other organizations are in a better position to lead.[15] Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, Cluster Lead Agencies were encouraged to consider developing a clearly defined, agreed and supported sharing of cluster leadership with NGOs wherever feasible. For further details on shared leadership, see Section 6.

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11   For example limited or lack of willingness or where duty bearers are party to the conflict.
12   See https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf and: http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/ files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf.
13   Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities. At: http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/IASC%20Guidance%20on%20Working%20with%20National%20Authorities_July2011.pdf.
14   See Section 4 on the Role of Clusters in Preparedness.
15   UNHCR is the Cluster Lead Agency of the Global Protection Cluster. However, at the country level in disaster situations or complex emergencies without significant displacement, the three protection-mandated agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR) will consult closely and, under the overall leadership of the HC/RC, agree which agency among the three will assume the role of Cluster Lead Agency for protection. In the case of service clusters (Logistics, Emergency Telecommunications), the CLA at country and global level also normally coincide, because service clusters require technical expertise that other agencies cannot be presumed to possess.

5. The RC/HC writes to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), following consultation with the HCT, outlining the recommended cluster arrangements, suggesting CLAs, and explaining why particular clusters need to be activated. Where non-cluster coordination solutions have been agreed upon as well, these are also described.

6. The ERC transmits the proposal to the IASC Principals for approval within 24 hours, and informs the RC/HC accordingly. The Principals may ask the IASC Emergency Directors Group to discuss in more detail, if necessary.

7. The ERC writes to the RC/HC to confirm the endorsement of activation of the suggested clusters and/or provide feedback from the IASC Principals.

8. The RC/HC informs relevant partners when decisions on clusters and lead agencies are approved.

Integrating Early Recovery

An Early Recovery Adviser may be appointed to assist the RC/HC to mainstream early recovery across clusters effectively, and ensure that multidisciplinary issues, which cannot be tackled by individual clusters alone, are addressed through inter-cluster coordination mechanisms.

If thematic early recovery issues, such as emergency employment, community infrastructure, or restoration of local government, are not be covered by existing clusters or alternative mechanisms, the RC/HC may recommend that a specific cluster be established to deal with such themes, in addition to the mainstreaming of early recovery.

Ensuring capacity for cluster activation, including in IASC L3 emergency responses

The IASC Transformative Agenda states that clusters will be professionally managed by dedicated, trained and experienced Cluster Coordinators and that information management will be prioritized and resources pooled in order to enhance the collection and analysis of data on the progress and impact of cluster activities.

With regard to IASC L3 emergency responses, IASC Principals expressed a firm commitment to have on standby for immediate deployment (within 72 hours) the necessary staff with the appropriate seniority, experience and skills to meet their commitment to the interagency response through the **Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism** (IARRM).[16] The IARRM is a composite of individual agency rapid response capacities, rather than a stand-alone integrated team. IASC agencies maintain rosters of senior experienced staff, who can be deployed rapidly to assist HCTs to define and implement a humanitarian response. In an IASC L3, IASC partners contribute information on their emergency response deployments to enable an overall mapping of capacity deployed through the IARRM.

The IARRM can provide coordination support to clusters, but also broader support. Activation of the IARRM does not imply activation of all or any clusters. The support offered via the IARRM takes into account the context of the response, capacity on the ground and logistical and access considerations.

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16   The functions of the IARRM are described in a IASC Transformative Agenda Protocol, at: http://www. humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-template-default&bd=87.

Section 3

Cluster Functions

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals recognized that the application of the cluster approach has become overly process-driven and, in some situations, perceived to potentially undermine rather than enable delivery.[17] They "agreed there is a need to restate and return to the original purpose of clusters, refocusing them on strategic and operational gaps analysis, planning, assessment and results".[18]

The **six core functions** of a cluster at country level are:

1. To support service delivery by:
    - Providing a platform that ensures service delivery is driven by the Humanitarian Response Plan and strategic priorities.
    - Developing mechanisms to eliminate duplication of service delivery.

2. To inform the HC/HCT's strategic decision-making by:
    - Preparing needs assessments and analysis of gaps (across and within clusters, using information management tools as needed) to inform the setting of priorities.
    - Identifying and finding solutions for (emerging) gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues.
    - Formulating priorities on the basis of analysis.

3. To plan and implement cluster strategies by:
    - Developing sectoral plans, objectives and indicators that directly support realization of the overall response's strategic objectives.
    - Applying and adhering to common standards and guidelines.
    - Clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing cluster contributions to the HC's overall humanitarian funding proposals.

4. To monitor and evaluate performance by:
    - Monitoring and reporting on activities and needs.
    - Measuring progress against the cluster strategy and agreed results.
    - Recommending corrective action where necessary.

5. To build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning (see Section 4).

6. To support robust advocacy by:
    - Identifying concerns, and contributing key information and messages to HC and HCT messaging and action.
    - Undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.

Detailed ToRs are available for the responsibilities and accountability of HCs, HCTs, CLAs and Cluster Coordinators.

In addition to supporting the six core functions of the cluster, the designated Cluster Lead Agency is the **Provider of Last Resort (POLR)**. This means that, where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as POLR, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil crucial gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led Humanitarian Response Plan.

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17   IASC, *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response*, November 2006. The initial aim of the cluster approach was, at global level, to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and provide clear leadership and accountability in the main areas of humanitarian response. At country level, it aims to strengthen partnerships, and the predictability and accountability of international humanitarian action, by improving prioritization and clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian organizations.
18   Recommendation 26, IASC, *Transformative Agenda: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions*, January 2012.

Section 4

The Role of Clusters in Preparedness

National authorities have primary responsibility for preparedness. However, RCs (and HCs where they exist) have a responsibility to ensure that the humanitarian system is in a position to support national actors, and is equipped to respond to a crisis. The RC/HC will therefore call on Cluster Lead Agencies to operationalize emergency response preparedness (ERP) in their respective sectors and monitor its quality and comprehensiveness.

In preparing for and responding to an emergency, international humanitarian actors are expected to cooperate with national authorities and support national capacity wherever it is feasible and appropriate to do so.[19]

Accountability for preparedness

Preparedness is a continuous process. Broadly defined, it includes any action, measure, or capacity development that is introduced before an emergency to improve the overall effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of a response and recovery. It builds the advance readiness of country teams, and strengthens their ability to respond during a crisis, when conditions deteriorate or new shocks occur. In practical terms, this requires country teams, supported by regional and global levels to:

- Identify key elements in the humanitarian programme cycle that require preparation in advance.

- Analyse and address anticipated risks to countries, populations and operations.

- Establish good working relationships with national authorities, accept their leadership where appropriate, and take fully into account their preparedness arrangements.

- Establish good working relationships with other partners whose cooperation will be critical in a response.

- Reinforce the coordination structures that will be used during a response.

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of different members of the humanitarian community, including responsibilities vis-à-vis national authorities.

What is preparedness?

The IASC Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) Approach provides a systematic and coherent multi-hazard approach to emergency preparedness that enables humanitarian actors to prepare themselves for rapid, effective and efficient action through three key components:[20] hazard identification, risk management and risk monitoring; Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPA); Contingency Planning and Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs). For a brief summary of the ERP Approach and each of these components, see Annex II.

Where ERP actions are to be implemented, HCTs and Global Clusters (in line with their responsibilities set out below), should monitor the quality of (i) Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Risk Monitoring (ii) MPAs and (iii) Contingency Planning and APAs, and assess whether these tasks have been completed, disseminated and understood by the relevant actors. Cluster Lead Agencies are expected to operationalize emergency response preparedness (ERP) in their respective sectors and monitor its quality and comprehensiveness.

The Emergency Response Preparedness Approach

19   See *Transformative Agenda Protocol: Common Framework for Preparedness*. At: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-template-default&bd=87.
20   A full explanation of ERP, as well as guidance and templates, can be found at: http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/emergency-response-preparedness

Preparedness responsibilities

The following scenarios outline who is responsible at country and global level for preparedness and applying the ERP approach, in three different contexts:

COUNTRIES WITH A HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR (HC). Formally activated clusters will exist in these countries, though not in all contexts, and the presence of an HC indicates that they are at high risk. This operational environment and the presence of humanitarian actors with experience mean that emergency preparedness will normally be more integrated and developed. Under the HC's leadership, clusters/sectors should be contributing to implementation of all three components of the ERP approach and engaging with national structures. MPAs should be particularly well understood and developed. Global Clusters should monitor the implementation of ERP actions at country level, and overall readiness, and support clusters/sectors as necessary.

COUNTRIES WITH A RESIDENT COORDINATOR, AT HIGH RISK OF EMERGENCIES AND REQUIRING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT.[21] In these countries, clusters may not have been activated formally, but sectoral coordination mechanisms (sectoral committees or roundtables, thematic or working groups) are likely to be active, in liaison with Government counterparts. Where sector partners have less experience of emergency preparedness or response, preparedness actions may be more challenging or take longer to implement. Governments may have developed preparedness, response and coordination arrangements in some sectors and therefore some sectors will be better prepared than others. Under the guidance of the RC and in close cooperation with Government, sector coordination mechanisms should help to operationalize relevant parts of the ERP Approach. Global Clusters should proactively support the RC and sector coordination mechanisms, encourage and support operationalization of the ERPs.

COUNTRIES WITH A RESIDENT COORDINATOR WHICH ARE AT LOW RISK OF EMERGENCIES REQUIRING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT. Clusters will not formally exist, and coordination mechanisms may not exist or may not be arranged in the same form as typical humanitarian response sectors. Government will have developed good preparedness, response and coordination arrangements in some sectors. The RC and sector lead agencies should promote coordination and preparedness actions in relevant sectors, using the risk profile, and assist Government and sectoral counterparts to plan how they will cooperate in the event of a crisis. In this context, sector lead agencies should prioritize the implementation of MPAs where gaps have been identified. Global Clusters are not expected to provide assistance unless specifically requested by the RC.

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21   The IASC Emergency Directors Group determine 'high risk' on the basis of the bi-annual IASC *Early Warning Early Action Report*, the yearly *Global Focus Model*, or the new *Index for Risk Management* (InfoRM).

Section 5

Cluster Management Arrangements

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, IASC Principals agreed that mutual accountability will be enhanced within and between the HC, HCT members, Cluster Coordinators and other cluster partners, based on a clear, concise, time-bound and results-orientated strategy to deliver. This section outlines the respective roles of the CLA, the Cluster Coordinator and all cluster participants at national and sub-national level. If a cluster is to fulfil its core functions, it is important to balance the need for consultation and leadership in an emergency. Key decisions need to have legitimacy and to be taken by a manageable number of partners.

Effective and efficient cluster management is a shared responsibility

A well-run cluster is one of the **formal deliverables** of CLAs.[22] However, the efficient functioning of a cluster is a **joint responsibility** of the CLA, the Cluster Coordinator, all participants in the cluster at national and sub-national level, and resourcing partners. During an emergency, clusters are expected to work with, and in support of, national authorities and support national capacity, wherever it is feasible and appropriate.

Characteristics of a well-managed cluster

Efficient cluster management should:

- Monitor performance of the six core cluster functions (see section 3), making sure that programmes clearly contribute to the implementation of strategic objectives and are based on sound field practices and agreed international benchmarks and standards.

- Establish and maintain a cluster, which:
  - Strengthens pre-existing sectoral coordination by increasing predictability and accountability.
  - Reinforces the complementarity of partner actions by avoiding duplication and gaps.
  - Advocates for adequate resources and ensures that resources are allocated according to agreed priorities and in a manner that fulfils the cluster response plan.
  - Ensures effective and comprehensive integration of relevant cross-cutting issues, including age, gender, environment and HIV/AIDs; links with specific advisers where available and identifies in-cluster focal points.
  - Ensures protection and early recovery are mainstreamed and integrated.

- Maintain the cluster's responsiveness to changes in the operating environment including by adjusting requirements, capacity, and participation.

- Ensure that information is effectively transferred between cluster members and to and from other stakeholders, and is well used.

- Contribute effectively to inter-cluster coordination forums) and cooperate with humanitarian actors, Government counterparts, and relevant authorities (as appropriate) in planning, coordination, and operational activities.

- Be accountable to affected people, by ensuring that women, men, girls and boys have equal opportunity to participate throughout the programme cycle, including through feedback mechanisms that are inclusive and consultative.

22   Reflecting the ToRs of CLAs.

There is no single approach to cluster management. Because disasters (and clusters) vary in scale and complexity, management of clusters must be adapted to the situation, and may need to change as a response evolves.

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, IASC Principals agreed that "participation in clusters should be better defined and managed to enhance the ability of clusters to provide strategic direction, including, where appropriate, through the creation of small 'Steering Committees' (SC) or 'Strategic Advisory Groups' (SAG) of key operational partners, complemented by separate forums or mechanisms to ensure broader information exchange for all cluster/sector partners'.[23]

Eligibility to participate in the more strategic management work of a cluster is based on the following criteria:[24]

1. Operational relevance in the emergency.

2. Technical expertise.

3. Demonstrated capacity to contribute strategically and to provide practical support.

4. Commitment to contribute consistently.

Often chaired by the Cluster Coordinator, SAGs develop and adjust a cluster's strategic framework, priorities and work plan. A SAG's membership should represent the overall cluster partnership, but should also be limited to improve effectiveness and efficiency. A SAG is expected to ensure a regular and two-way flow of information with its broader cluster membership.

No one-size-fits-all approach to cluster management

Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)

POSSIBLE SAG MEMBERS	
NATIONAL LEVEL	**SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL**
• Cluster Coordinator. • Government (technical) representatives. • National NGO technical experts. • International NGO technical experts. • Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement technical experts.[25] • UN agency technical experts. • OCHA (inter-cluster).	The national-level SAG should determine whether sub-national management is needed, taking account of the context. (See the section on sub-national coordination) Its membership does not need to mirror that of national clusters and often includes more representatives of local authorities and NGO partners.
POTENTIAL INVITEES (AS APPROPRIATE)	
Sub-national cluster focal points. Donor representatives. Regional focal points with technical expertise based at regional level. Military representatives and other authorities, as appropriate.	

Technical Working Groups (TWiGs or TWGs) are small, task oriented and time limited. They are created on a needs-basis, for example to agree minimum standards and formulate appropriate technical practices, and should dissolve once they have completed their task. TWiGs are coordinated by a focal point or technical adviser, and are composed of relevant technical experts.

Technical Working Groups

23 Final Summary and Action Points, IASC Principals meeting, 13 December 2011, recommendation 29.
24 See Section 7 on general commitments for participation in clusters.
25 Depending on the context, RC/RC representatives may prefer to be invitees.

Section 6

Sharing Leadership

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, Cluster Lead Agencies were encouraged to consider developing a clearly defined, agreed and supported sharing of cluster leadership by NGOs wherever feasible.

Evaluations and research have found that, when clusters share leadership between UN agencies, NGOs, IOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement,[26] partnerships, advocacy and information transfer tend to improve. Sharing leadership produces stronger engagement and better coordination. NGOs are often well established in remote field locations where the UN has limited or no presence. They can offer technical expertise, different approaches to accountability to affected people, long-term involvement in and knowledge of the community, and leadership potential.

Shared forms of leadership distribute global, national or sub-national responsibilities for CLA or cluster coordination to two or more agencies. They set out clear roles, define accountabilities and promote mutual understanding.

When considering sharing the leadership of a cluster, the following points should be taken into account:

1. ToRs or memorandums of understanding **must** be developed, to ensure the parties have a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. Examples of different ToRs are available online.[27] Those involved should jointly determine which shared leadership model works best for the context they are in. The ToR must be completed and understood in advance, because organizations that take on a shared leadership role will usually need to recruit full-time staff.

2. Sharing leadership can strengthen cluster leadership but does not displace the core responsibilities and accountability of the designated in-country CLA, including its role as Provider of Last Resort.[28]

Terms used to describe sharing leadership vary. Co-facilitator, co-coordinator, co-steward, co-lead, sub-cluster coordination, sub-national leadership, work group membership, task force chairs and secondment are all used in different contexts. Within the complex and diverse environment of a response, harmonization of language should be sought; Global Cluster Lead Agencies and HCTs are encouraged to provide guidance when shared leadership ToRs are being developed at country level.

1. Effective shared leadership has transactional costs, in workload and financially. Resource partners, the RC/HC and the HCT should ensure that funding is not an obstacle for agencies that wish to share cluster leadership. When possible (and where financial mechanisms under its authority, the RC/HC and HCT should help to mobilize funds to support shared leadership in a transparent manner; in other cases, and in other countries, donor support should be encouraged.[29]

Sharing leadership

What does sharing leadership mean?

Terminology for shared leadership

For further consideration

26   Subject to the mandates of the three different components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.
27   Several clusters, including CCCM and Education, can provide useful sources. See: http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/share-leadership. Refer to the good practice catalogue on the IASC website. In South Sudan, for example, a generic ToR for NGO cluster co-coordinators is being developed.
28   The 2008 definition of Provider of Last Resort (POLR) was revised by the IASC Principals in December 2011 and now reads: "Where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as POLR, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil critical gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led HCT Humanitarian Response Plan" (revision underlined)..
29   The Framework on Cluster Coordination Costs and Functions in Humanitarian Emergencies at Country

2. Sharing will not compensate for poor core leadership. It is often assumed that shared leadership will improve leadership by increasing capacity. It is incumbent on the CLA and its partners to ensure that enough qualified staff are put in leadership positions.

3. All relevant actors should have opportunities to train in areas of competency that are essential to successful management of a shared leadership structure.

4. Not all actors are willing or able to share leadership responsibilities. As with cluster activation, decisions to share leadership should be based on an assessment of needs and capacities on the ground.

5. Though difficulties arise in some cases, it is a goal of every response that national Government should fulfil its responsibilities to its people. Those in shared leadership roles should help to build national capacity.

Examples of shared leadership can be found at Annex III.

Level (May 2011) highlights the value of giving NGOs leadership roles in coordination, and states that "donors will also explore mechanisms to fund NGOs directly for coordination roles".

Section 7

Minimum Commitments for Participation in Clusters

No one-size-fits-all approach to cluster management

Without the constant commitment of cluster participants, predictable coordination will not be achieved.

The minimum commitments for participation in country-level clusters set out what all local, national or international organizations undertake to contribute. They do not seek to exclude organizations or national authorities from participating in clusters.

CLAs have a reciprocal responsibility to ensure that they lead their clusters in a manner that goes beyond merely share information and coordinates effectively with their sub-national counterparts[30] The responsibility of CLAs, and Cluster Coordinators, is to provide a forum for humanitarian action that meets affected people's needs and supports other levels of the strategic response (for example, inter-cluster coordination at country and global levels).

Agreeing to the commitments

All cluster partners (including CLAs in their role as implementer alongside other agencies) have a shared mutual responsibility to meet the humanitarian needs of affected people in a timely manner.

> **The minimum commitments are not prescriptive and should be adapted to actual needs and context, since cluster-based responses vary greatly in scale and complexity. They are a starting point and should be considered as an absolute minimum. Country-level clusters should base themselves on this document when they develop or update their ToRs and commitments.**

Minimum commitments

The minimum commitments for participation in clusters include:

1. Commitment to humanitarian principles, the *Principles of Partnership*[31], cluster-specific guidance and internationally recognized programme standards, including the Secretary-General's *Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*.

2. Commitment to mainstream protection in programme delivery (including respect for principles of non-discrimination, do no harm, etc.).

3. Readiness to participate in actions that specifically improve accountability to affected people, in line with the IASC *Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations*[32] and the related *Operational Framework*.

4. A demonstrated understanding of the duties and responsibilities associated with membership of the cluster, as defined by IASC ToRs and guidance notes[33], any cluster-specific guidance, and country cluster ToRs, where available.

5. Active participation in the cluster and a commitment to consistently engage in the cluster's collective work.

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30   Use of the terms 'Cluster Coordinator', 'Cluster Lead Agency' and 'Humanitarian Country Team' follows the IASC Guidance Note on *Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response*, November 2006; the Joint Letter from Cluster Lead Agencies to their Directors/Representatives at Country Level, October 2009; and IASC, *Guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams*, November 2009.
31   These include the values of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility, and complementarity. See: www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org.
32   These list leadership and governance; transparency; feedback and complaints; participation; and design, monitoring and evaluation. See Revised Action Points, IASC Principals meeting, 13 December 2011.
33   These include, but are not limited to, the *Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster at the Country Level*, and IASC guidance on particular cross-cutting issues and information management.

6. Capacity and willingness to contribute to the cluster's response plan and activities, which must include inter-cluster coordination.

7. Commitment to mainstream key programmatic cross-cutting issues (including age, gender, environment and HIV/AIDs).

8. Commitment by a relevant senior staff member to work consistently with the cluster to fulfil its mission.

9. Commitment to work cooperatively with other cluster partners to ensure an optimal and strategic use of available resources, and share information on organizational resources.

10. Willingness to take on leadership responsibilities in sub-national or working groups as needed, subject to capacity and mandate.

11. Undertake advocacy, and disseminate advocacy messages to affected communities, the host Government, donors, the HCT, CLAs, the media and other audiences.

12. Ensure that the cluster provides interpretation (in an appropriate language) so that all cluster partners are able to participate, including local organizations (and national and local authorities where appropriate)

Section 8

Inter-Cluster Coordination

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals agreed that efforts will be made to improve overall inter-cluster coordination. Inter-cluster coordination is critical[34] to achieving common objectives, avoiding duplication and prioritising areas of need. Inter-cluster coordination takes place at the national and sub-national level, to coordinate the implementation of the response through each step of the humanitarian programme cycle.

Definition and purpose

The HC and HCT (comprised of Heads of Agencies) provide overall strategic direction to the humanitarian community in support of the national response. The RC/HC and HCT, supported by OCHA, determine the shape and functions of inter-cluster coordination during a crisis.

Roles and responsibilities

Guided by the HCT, the inter-cluster coordination platform, chaired by OCHA and comprised of Cluster Coordinators, enables clusters to work together to advance the delivery of assistance to affected people effectively and efficiently. It does this by encouraging synergies between sectors, ensuring roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, closing potential gaps and eliminating duplication. Inter-cluster coordination plays a critical role in facilitating the development of the Humanitarian Response Plan and assures a coherent and coordinated approach to planning and operationalizing the shared strategic objectives.[35]

Delivering an effective response and achieving the strategic objectives requires continuous two-way communication between the HCT and clusters, with the inter-cluster coordination forum serving as a critical link, ensuring the HCT is advised of operational developments impacting the overall response and that clusters receive overall strategic guidance from the HCT. OCHA supports this communication and facilitates inter-cluster coordination by chairing and providing direct support, facilitation and secretariat services, as determined by the RC/HC and HCT. Participation of the Chair of the inter-cluster coordination forum, sequencing of cluster, inter-cluster and HCT meetings, and sharing of notes between the HCT and inter-cluster coordination forum, are key practical steps that can be implemented.

The diagram below conceptualises how these different linkages are made.

Humanitarian Country Team
Provides strategic direction through the articulation of strategic objectives and operational support to their achievement. CLAs ensure an inter-sectoral analysis informs HCT decision-making.

Strategic Objectives (SOs)
Determined by the HCT, relevant clusters group together to develop multi-sectoral strategies in achievement of the SO and coordinate to implement and monitor their achievement.

Inter-cluster
Clusters work together throughout the components of the HPC to achieve the humanitarian priorities as set by the SOs. Focusing on key operational issues which impact on an effective and efficient response; clusters highlight issues which require strategic support.

EXAMPLES OF CLUSTERS FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES

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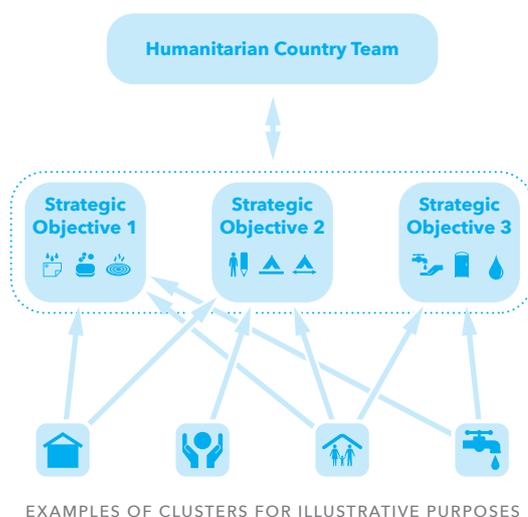
34 For the purposes of this section, clusters and sectors are equally relevant but the term inter-cluster coordination will be used throughout.
35 The strategic objective itself and the humanitarian context will determine which sectors are needed for its achievement.

Coordination of inter-cluster response and operational issues

OCHA's role and responsibilities for inter-cluster coordination

Inter-cluster coordination supports clusters to work together to facilitate the delivery of the Humanitarian Response Plan's strategic objectives in the most efficient and effective way.[36] This coordination among clusters also helps in the identification of core advocacy concerns emerging from the operational response and the identification of resource gaps impacting operational delivery. Some strategic objectives may require contributions from all clusters and others a more limited group and should be determined through inter-cluster discussions with all clusters. Smaller groups of clusters, potentially supported by members of the HCT, may come together to discuss specific strategies for and periodically for monitoring of their achievement, although all clusters and the HCT need to be aware of progress and challenges to ensure the appropriate overall linkages as necessary. Illustrative examples of what this can mean in practice can be found at Annex IV.

OCHA provides capacity at an appropriate level to support and lead inter-cluster coordination, as determined by the HC/HCT. Working closely with CLAs, OCHA:

- Supports and facilitates inter-cluster coordination in relation to the HCT, the Humanitarian Response Plan, and across all clusters, and will support inter-cluster coordination forums or mechanisms as requested by the HC/HCT.

- Ensures that all clusters and other relevant national and international operational actors are fully involved in strategic planning, implementation and other key issues that arise during inter-cluster coordination working groups.

- Assists clusters to deliver components of the humanitarian programme cycle. (Examples include coordinated multi-sectoral needs assessments, analysis and recommendations for prioritization, and the Humanitarian Response Plan (see

- Facilitates and supports inter-cluster coordination to plan and implement strategic objectives.

- Assists HC/HCT to define and put in place appropriate coordination mechanisms at all levels, including decentralized coordination via sub-national clusters or sectors in zones of operational importance.

- Supports protection main-streaming efforts at the inter-cluster level in close collaboration with the Protection Cluster.

- Helps clusters (as needed) to provide a needs-based, impartial response that analyses and takes into account the different needs of women, men, girls and boys, and the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of affected people (with respect to gender and age, for example).

- Supports efforts to ensure that protection, accountability to affected populations and early recovery inform all steps of the humanitarian programme cycle.

- Informs the HC/HCT of operational progress and any issues that may require their input, advocacy or other support.

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36   The modalities for inter cluster coordination should be flexible. In the case of the protection cluster, the AoRs (or 'sub-clusters') may need to liaise directly with other clusters and to engage directly in inter-cluster fora alongside the protection cluster, and arrangements for doing so should be agreed at country level In consultation with the protection cluster lead agency.

- Assists clusters to identify and develop advocacy issues and initiatives on strategic and operational questions; brings them to the attention of the HC/HCT.

- Supports the HC/HCT and clusters in facilitating cluster coordination monitoring, including: (i) cluster performance monitoring; and (ii) regular reviews by the HCT of the architecture of cluster coordination (see section 10, Cluster Coordination Monitoring).

- Supports efforts to define common standards, tools and services (including service clusters), to create a conducive strategic and operational environment for clusters.

- Supports linkages between humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms, minimising duplication and maximising synergies.

- Provides inter-cluster information management tools and coordination as needed.

- Works with the HCT and clusters to facilitate pooled/common humanitarian funding allocations.

Sub-National Coordination

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, IASC Principals agreed that greater attention needs to be paid to coordination mechanisms at the sub-national level, which do not necessarily mirror those at the national level, but rather need to be adapted to the specific context. Sub-national coordination takes place in zones of particular operational importance when multiple partners are responding. Sub-national coordination is critical when responses take place in remote areas (such as parts of Sudan) or extend over a large territory (as in DRC).

Humanitarian operations that employ both national and sub-national clusters have been found to be more effective than ones that coordinate through a single national cluster. Though sub-national coordination structures may vary across regions, they should facilitate decentralized decision-making and shorten response time. Sub-national coordination mechanisms are in a better position than their national counterparts to

- Strengthen accountability to affected people.

- Adapt the response, including priorities to local circumstances.

- Work closely with local authorities and partners.

- Support real-time implementation of the Humanitarian Response Plan, and address cross-cutting and multidimensional issues arising in the immediate context.

Assessment and strategic response planning include the sub-national level, ensuring that sub-national needs, priorities and activities are taken into account.

Importance of sub-national coordination

The establishment of sub-national clusters should be formalized in ToRs (endorsed by the national CLA). TORs should be framed in terms of clusters' core functions and should establish clear lines of accountability between national and sub-national clusters. Inter-cluster coordination at sub-national level may require dedicated support. In some cases, a sub-national HCT (with cluster representation) has replaced an inter-cluster forum.[37]

Depending on available resources and the operational context, sub-national clusters should make cluster staff available to meet cluster needs, including for coordination and information management. Sub-national clusters also offer opportunities for humanitarian partners and national authorities to share cluster leadership.

In some cases, more capacity and seniority are needed at sub-national level, close to operations, than at national level; experience has shown that clusters at capital level were not always needed.[38] As with all clusters, sub-national clusters should only be established on the basis of operational needs and should be deactivated as soon as those needs are met, or when local coordination capacity is adequate. Sub-national clusters do not need to mirror the national structure.

Sub-national cluster establishment

National-level clusters should provide support and policy direction to sub-national clusters. Ideally, national meetings should take place after sub-national ones, and both should produce a reliable record of decisions. The links between sub-national and national clusters should:

- Facilitate reporting, information-sharing and collaboration with national

Relationship between national and sub-national clusters

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37   OCHA normally leads and supports inter-cluster coordination at all levels; it is the responsibility of the HC and HCT to determine its most appropriate form and function.
38   In such cases, regional clusters assume the responsibilities of national clusters.

and other sub-national clusters.

- Promote the coherence of national programming and overall coordination.

- Help to track trends.

- Identify shared and common concerns in operational areas.

- Develop more upstream advocacy and programming strategies.

Monitoring Cluster Coordination

What is monitoring cluster coordination?

The IASC Transformative Agenda calls for mutual accountability to be enhanced within and between the HC, HCT members, cluster coordinators and other cluster partners. Cluster coordination aims to strengthen the organization of the international humanitarian community and to make it more accountable to affected people.

This section discusses **cluster coordination monitoring**; through[39]:

1. Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM) a self-assessment of cluster performance in terms of the six core cluster functions and accountability to affected people.

2. A Cluster Coordination Architecture Review – an HC-led review, undertakn on an annual basis at a minimum, which examines the continued appropriateness and relevance of cluster coordination structures.

Monitoring cluster coordination at national and sub-national level is necessary to ensure that clusters are: efficient and effective coordination mechanisms, fulfil the core cluster functions, support efficient delivery of relevant services, meet the needs of cluster members, and demonstrate accountability to affected people. Clusters are time bound and, wherever possible, should transition to emergency or recovery coordination structures that are led or supported nationally. Monitoring also ensures that the architecture of coordination responds to changes in the context and in coordination needs. It is important to demonstrate the value that coordination structures bring, both for accountability and to justify the costs involved.

Why monitor cluster coordination?

Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM) is a self-assessment exercise. Clusters assess their performance against the six core cluster functions (see section 3) and accountability to affected people. It is a country-led process, supported globally. Ideally, it is carried out by all clusters/sectors at the same time but can be implemented on demand by individual clusters. A CCPM enables all cluster partners and coordinators to identify strengths and weaknesses of performance and paths to improvement.

1. Cluster performance monitoring

Complementary to humanitarian response monitoring, which measures aid delivered to an affected population as well as the achieved results against the objectives set out in the strategic response plan, CCPM reviews cluster functions to see whether they are being implemented adequately to support the delivery of the shared strategic response plan. It combines an objective description of how the cluster is organised and what its deliverables are, with feedback through a survey from all partners on how they are involved, contribute and make use of these functions and their deliverables.

A CCPM should ideally be implemented **three to six months after the onset of, or spike in, an emergency** and **annually thereafter**. In protracted crises, the recommendation is to complete a CCPM annually. Detailed guidance is available on each step of a CCPM at Annex V[40].

39   Note: this section discusses monitoring of cluster coordination, not monitoring of activities that clusters deliver. For information on monitoring of humanitarian programmes and activities, see Humanitarian Response Monitoring Guidance note at http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/programme-cycle/space/page/monitoring-overview.
40   At: http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/improve-cluster-performance.

The IASC Transformative Agenda states that cluster-coordination architecture should be reviewed regularly to ensure that cluster coordination structures remain 'fit for purpose'. In **new emergencies**, cluster coordination architecture should be reviewed **immediately**[41] and then within **three months**, as in L3 emergency responses.[42] In **protracted crises**, it should be reviewed immediately and then **annually**.[43]

A cluster coordination architecture review is initiated and led by the HC/HCT, supported by OCHA. It assesses whether cluster coordination structures continue to be appropriate in light of changes in the humanitarian context and determines whether they should (i) continue as they are, (ii) be expanded, (iii) be streamlined, or (iv) transition with a plan and benchmarks for deactivation. Section 11 describes transition and de-activation and the implementation of cluster coordination architecture reviews.

Cluster coordination architecture reviews may be informed by CCPM results, but decisions on whether a cluster remains 'fit for purpose' must be based on an analysis of changes in the humanitarian context and national coordination capacity. OCHA assists RC/HCs to ensure that reviews at country level are carried out in a timely manner, and monitors the implementation of reviews globally.

2. Cluster coordination architecture review

41 To ensure pre-crisis cluster coordination architecture remains appropriate in the new context
42 This period aligns the review of coordination structures with the review of an L3 declaration (and empowered leadership), which also takes place at three months. See Protocol 2, *Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation* (April 2012), and Protocol 1, *Empowered Leadership* (April 2012).
43 33, IASC, Transformative Agenda: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions (January 2012).

Cluster Transition and De-activation

As noted in section 2, a cluster is time-bound. A cluster is activated where response and coordination gaps exist, and national response or coordination capacity cannot meet needs in a manner that respects humanitarian principles.[44] Clusters should be deactivated when that gap no longer exists.

Cluster deactivation is the closure of a formally activated cluster. De-activation includes the transfer of core functions from clusters that have international leadership and accountability to other structures, including those that are led nationally or development focused.[45] Functions may be transferred to existing or pre-crisis coordination and response structures, or new ones.

Cluster transition refers to the process (and potentially the activities) by which the transfer of leadership and accountabilities is planned and implemented, leading to de-activation. A plan is required to map phases of the transition, set transition or de-activation benchmarks for each phase, and schedule activities to meet them.

It is important to regularly review the need for clusters.[46] Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, IASC Principals agreed that there should be an annual review conducted by each HC/HCT and report to the ERC of the ongoing status of clusters in every country operation, with a view to recommending continuing, deactivating, scaling down and/or handover of clusters, as appropriate.

Where clusters are not formally activated, it is recommended to carry out regular reviews of the existing humanitarian coordination architectures for the same purpose.

The de-activation of formally activated clusters may be considered when at least one of the conditions that led to its activation is no longer present, i.e.:

1. The humanitarian situation improves, significantly reducing humanitarian needs and consequently reducing associated response and coordination gaps.

2. National structures acquire sufficient capacity to coordinate and meet residual humanitarian needs in line with humanitarian principles.

Four principles should guide and inform transition and de-activation processes.

1. **They are initiated and led by the HC, in consultation with the HCT, wherever possible in close collaboration with national authorities and supported by OCHA**. CLAs, cluster partners and national counterparts should also be involved in drafting and agreeing the review and its recommendations, and preparing transition or de-activation plans.

2. **They are based on assessment of national capacity**,[47] including:

What does transition and de-activation of clusters mean?

How do we determine when to de-activate?

What criteria need to be met for de-activation?

Principles for the transition and de-activation process?

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44 See Section 2 for Criteria for Cluster Activation.
45 De-activation can transfer leadership and accountabilities to other internationally supported mechanisms.
46 For frequency of reviews, see this section: When does review of cluster coordination architecture take place? Regular reviews should also make sure that clusters adapt to changing circumstances and remain light, efficient, effective and fit for purpose.
47 See IASC, *Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on working with National Authorities*, July 2011.

- The presence, structure and resources of relevant response and coordination mechanisms. Where clusters are able to hand over to national counterparts, transition will be easier and probably faster.
- De-activation can also be induced by a Government declaration that an emergency is over, shifting the focus to recovery and development coordination structures.
- The functions of some clusters (for example, protection or WASH) are likely to be transferred to a variety of national structures. Service clusters (ETC, Logistics) may first transition to facilitating access to commercial or national services, prior to phasing out.
- Not all clusters must be de-activated at the same time; the timing of de-activation is related to ongoing needs and the presence or absence of national structures competent to manage the functions in question.

3. **They take account of the context**, including the scale of residual or continued humanitarian needs, and the ability of successor mechanisms to respond in line with humanitarian principles.
   - De-activation in sudden onset crises may be more rapid than in complex or protracted emergencies.
   - The probability of recurring or new disasters (and the costs of closure and subsequent re-establishment) may outweigh the benefits of de-activation, especially if investments have been made in capacity-building and preparedness.

4. **They are guided by early recovery and resilience-building objectives**. Integrating early recovery objectives in transition and de-activation plans ensures that humanitarian actors consider the sustainability of their response, take steps to build national and local capacity, emphasize preparedness, and support long-term recovery and development objectives.
   - Where feasible, clusters should share cluster leadership with national actors, and work with national counterparts to build their capacity to assume coordination roles in humanitarian preparedness and response as well as recovery and development. Care should be taken to avoid transferring leadership before capacity is in place.

Merging of clusters

There have been several examples of non-service clusters being merged at country level either during the activation process, where it has seemed to be streamlined, efficient and in line with the available capacity in that specific context, or in the transition process as a way of phasing out the cluster system. Where merging is considered, particular attention should be given to defining accountabilities and roles of the lead agencies in country, and how support will be provided by the global clusters.

Does transition and de-activation mean funds are not required?

De-activation of a cluster does not mean that humanitarian funding is no longer required. Transitional activities, including capacity-building, can be included in budgets to meet core cluster functions. Funding may also be required to enable national and other authorities to coordinate action to meet residual or continued humanitarian needs or strengthen preparedness.[48] Lack of funding is not a reason to de-activate a cluster.

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48   For information on funding for transition, see IASC Task Team, *Humanitarian Financing*.

During a transition process, the line of accountability for core cluster functions and responsibilities (such as Provider of Last Resort[49]) must be clearly articulated. While a cluster is formally activated, accountability remains with the CLA.[50] Transition plans should outline how accountabilities will shift to Government or to other crisis-coordination mechanisms.[51]

While the HC, HCT and CLAs continue to operate, they are responsible for establishing preparedness and ensuring that preparedness actions are carried out (as outlined in section 4 on the Role of Clusters in Preparedness).

The table below summarizes the recommendations for review of cluster coordination architecture, transition and de-activation in two different contexts.[52]

CONTEXT	REVIEW	IMPLICATIONS
1. Sudden-onset emergency	**Within three months**. Review the cluster coordination architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose.	The HC/HCT should ensure that clusters have developed an outline of a transition or de-activation strategy at 90 days after activation.
2. Protracted crises	**Annually**. Review the cluster coordination architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose.[53] Do this more often if strategic response plans are revised to reflect changes in the humanitarian context.[54] Where possible, review before the start of new strategic planning cycles.	The HC reports annually to the ERC on review results, the rationale for structures, and any plans for transition or de-activation. Previous versions of the transition/ de-activation plans are updated based on the annual review.

OCHA will coordinate with HCs to ensure timely reviews of cluster coordination architecture.

Good practice suggests that the HC/HCT, clusters and national authorities should develop transition and de-activation strategies at the start of a response. Immediate transition steps may include:

1. Involve national counterparts and development partners in coordination and strategic planning from the outset.

2. Establish strong links between humanitarian and development coordination bodies to ensure that recovery approaches are aligned with national development objectives and strengthen national preparedness and response capacity.

3. Where possible, introduce co-leadership arrangements with national

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49   The Provider of Last Resort concept states that 'Where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as POLR, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil critical gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led HCT strategic response plan'.
50   In line with accountabilities agreed in cluster approach guidance and in CLA ToRs.
51   This will be clearest when clusters have obvious Government counterparts (as in education and health). Other clusters may need to work with a range of Government or civil society mechanisms. Service clusters may have no natural counterparts, but may work with Government or other coordination structures to hand over service provision or strengthen preparedness
52   See also IASC Principals, Transformative Agenda Compendium of Agreed Actions, No. 33, December 2011.
53   IASC Principals, *Transformative Agenda Compendium of Agreed Actions*, No. 33, December 2011.
54   Annual reviews are also mentioned in Section 10 of *Cluster Coordination Monitoring*.

authorities for clusters, during the activation process or as early as possible.

A review can also lead to the activation of new clusters.

How is a cluster coordination architecture review carried out? How long does it take?

Cluster architecture reviews should:

1. Be initiated by the HC/HCT and supported by OCHA.

2. Involve cluster lead agencies, cluster partners and national counterparts.

3. Keep Global Clusters informed.

4. Be guided and informed by the five principles outlined above.

The HC/HCT have some room to decide how best to carry out a cluster architecture review. The type and duration of an emergency, and initial assessments of national capacity, will influence its comprehensiveness and length. In all cases, however, clear and feasible handover plans should be considered from an early date; and they should include proposals for strengthening the capacity of local partners. Supported by OCHA, the ERC monitors reviews of cluster coordination architecture globally.

When preparing transition and de-activation plans, a cluster should:

1. Map preparedness arrangements, and response and coordination needs (based on the six cluster functions listed in Section 3 of this Module).

2. Identify Government and other coordination-and-response mechanisms that are competent to assume leadership and accountability for the cluster's functions, noting that responsibilities and accountabilities may pass to a range of officials or institutions and that not all need to be transferred at the same time.

3. Assess the capacity of these mechanisms to assume responsibility.

4. Determine what must be done over what period to build capacity, during the transition or to enable de-activation.

5. Assess whether the criteria are met for creating new clusters.

6. Define how CLAs and national counterparts are accountable for cluster functions during transition and de-activation, and take steps to ensure accountability is preserved. Set benchmarks to indicate phased transitions towards de-activation.

7. Propose a timetable for transition or de-activation.

8. Propose a timetable for additional cluster reviews as appropriate.

9. Decide how preparedness will be maintained or strengthened after de-activation (in line with Section 4) and define any continued role for the CLA.

Role of Global Clusters

When a review occurs, Global Clusters support the process and share lessons learned. They should be involved in planning reviews and should be kept informed at every stage. The HC or OCHA office in-country can seek support from OCHA globally to make sure that the review takes account of current learning.

Is there an agreed process to formalise cluster coordination review proposals?

When a review has taken place and proposals have been agreed, the following should happen:

1. Under the HC's leadership and in close collaboration with national

authorities, the HCT notes if clusters should (i) continue as they are, (ii) be expanded, (iii) be streamlined, or (iv) transition, with a plan and benchmarks for deactivation.

2. The HC provides the ERC and national authorities with a summary of the review and proposals for any changes, specific changes or transfers in accountability, any continuing role for the CLAs and how preparedness will be continued in any new structures.

3. The ERC transmits the summary to the IASC Principals, and shares it with the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG), Global Cluster Lead Agencies, and Co-lead agencies for approval, allowing at least ten days for consultation when a rapid response is not necessary. The Principals may ask the EDG to discuss reviews in more detail if necessary.

4. Once approved, the HC informs relevant partners of the arrangements that have been agreed.

Annexes

IASC clusters and government-led sectors:
roles and responsibilities

The IASC emergency response
preparedness approach in brief

Examples of shared leadership

Examples of inter-cluster coordination and
linkage between clusters

Cluster coordination performance
monitoring

	ACTIVATED CLUSTER	SECTORAL EMERGENCY COORDINATION
Leadership	The designated Cluster Lead Agency (or agencies) leads and manages the cluster. Where possible, it does so in co-leadership with Government bodies and NGOs. Strong links should be made with development coordination bodies to ensure that early recovery approaches are aligned with national development objectives and that steps are taken to strengthen national preparedness and response capacity.	National Government or a designated national agency leads the sector. International humanitarian support can augment national capacity, underpinned by the principles of the cluster approach.
Accountability	A Cluster Lead Agency is accountable for its cluster performance to the HC and ERC, as well as to national authorities and affected people. Performance is measured in terms of needs met, results against the objectives of the strategic response plan, and respect for national and humanitarian law and principles.	Government is accountable for the quality of the response, and for acting in accordance with national and humanitarian law and principles.
Provider of Last Resort (POLR)	Where necessary, and depending on access, security and availability of funding, the cluster lead, as POLR, must be ready to ensure the provision of services required to fulfil critical gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led HCT humanitarian response plan (revision to 2008 definition underlined).	As stated in General Assembly resolution 46/182, national authorities have the primary responsibility for taking care of victims of natural disasters and other emergencies that occur in their territory.[55]
Lifespan	Activated clusters are temporary and subject to regular review (see Sections 10 and 11).	Long term; structures are defined by the Government.
Mainstreaming of protection, early recovery strategies, and cross-cutting issues	The Cluster Lead Agency is responsible for ensuring that protection, early recovery strategies, and cross-cutting issues, are mainstreamed into programming.	International partners can advise Government on mainstreaming. International partners have a duty to respect internationally agreed principles, and align their programming to national policies, guidance and standards.
Human resources for coordination	The Cluster Lead Agency will provide cluster staff to meet needs, including the need for coordination and information management.	Government bodies are responsible for ensuring that sufficient coordination capacity is available.
Technical support	Relevant cluster members or the CLA in-country, or the Global Cluster, may provide technical support and guidance.	In-country agencies or the relevant global cluster may provide technical support and guidance as needed, when capacity and resources allow.
Role of Global Clusters in preparedness	Global clusters do not restrict their support to formally activated clusters. If there is a high level of risk, they may support other humanitarian coordination and response structures. The IASC Emergency Directors Group assesses risk, using the IASC's Early Warning Early Action Report (See Section 4).[56]	

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55   See: http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/582/70/IMG/NR058270.pdf?OpenElement.
56   At: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-common-default&sb=14.

The IASC Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) Approach provides a systematic and coherent multi-hazard approach to emergency preparedness that enables humanitarian actors to prepare themselves for rapid, effective and efficient action.

The ERP Approach has three components:

1. Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Risk Monitoring

Hazards are identified and analysis ranks them as either low, medium or high level of risk, based on potential impact and likelihood. This generates a country risk profile. Risk analysis is usually undertaken with national authorities and national capacity is included in an assessment of impact. This helps ensure that IASC preparedness efforts are relevant to programmes that assist national and local actors develop their own preparedness capacity. Indeed a common understanding of risk is the first step in the IASC/UNDG/UNISDR Common Framework on Preparedness.[57]

Risk analysis leads HCTs to the development and review of Contingency Plans for seasonal hazards that pose risk at known times, or for static hazards like earthquakes that pose a risk at all times. Other hazards, such as conflict, that evolve more unpredictably are monitored and discussed as part of regular UNCT/HCT meetings, leading to decisions on when to develop Contingency Plans and implement advanced preparedness actions.

2. Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPA)

MPAs are a set of activities that every HCT must implement in order to establish a minimum level of emergency preparedness at the country level. The MPAs are not risk or scenario-specific and usually do not require significant additional resources to accomplish. Rather, it requires management commitment and dedication of some staff time to ensure that those Minimum Preparedness Actions are not only planned, but also implemented. The MPAs are broken into the following categories:

a. Risk Monitoring

b. Coordination & Management Arrangements

c. Assessment/Information Management/Response Monitoring Arrangements

d. Operational Capacity and Arrangements to Deliver Relief and Protection

3. Contingency Planning and Advanced Preparedness Actions

Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs) are designed to guide a HCT to an advanced level of readiness to respond to a specific risk. The APA checklist is a management tool that facilitates recording action status and responsible focal points in key categories of preparedness activities. Some APAs may require additional resources in the form of budgets, materials or personnel.

Unlike the MPAs, the APAs are risk-specific. The APAs should be

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57   See http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/downloadDoc.aspx?docID=6676 The Common Framework on Preparedness seeks to use capability acquired for humanitarian action in a coherent manner to assist development of national and local preparedness. A key element is formulation of nationally owned plans for this capacity development.

implemented when risk anlaysis indicates a "moderate risk", when risk monitoring indicates that a crisis is imminent or when there is a potential high impact hazard for which there is unlikely to be warning, such as an earthquake. They build on the MPAs already in place, and complement as well as implement actions identified in the Contingency Plan.

A Contingency Plan (CP) sets out the initial response strategy and operational plan that would be reflected in a Flash Appeal to meet critical humanitarian needs during the first three to four weeks of an emergency, should a scenario materialise. The impetus to formulate a CP is the same as APAs - when risk analysis indicates a "moderate risk", when risk monitoring indicates that a crisis is imminent or when there is a potential high impact hazard for which there is unlikely to be warning. Ideally, a CP should be developed for each of these risks, although resources are unlikely to be available at the country level to accomplish this. A practical compromise is to:

• Identify the risk that poses the greatest challenge in terms of number of beneficiaries, geographic spread, support requirements and access constraints;

• Elaborate the scenario related to this risk;

• Develop a plan to meet the resulting need;

• Examine the other risks to check to see whether the broad capability to meet the most challenging risk will cover these other risks;

• If not, amend the existing CP in the areas which differ or – where this is not possible – develop a separate CP.

A CP should be updated and modified when more specific information (locations, likely humanitarian impact, etc.) becomes available. A CP should seamlessly transform into a Flash Appeal if the emergency occurs.

The Global Logistics Cluster seconds NGO staff with specialized skills to the global cluster support cell from where they can be deployed to serve as Cluster Coordinators. This model provides training, ensures a consistent approach to each Logistics Cluster deployment, makes sure that information management and reporting are handled consistently, applies lessons learned uniformly, and involves seconded staff in preparedness missions. It also allows NGOs, which might not be in a position to take on Provider of Last Resort responsibilities, to operate with authority at field level, on behalf of the Logistics Cluster, supported by WFP.

In other cases, leadership responsibilities have been shared sequentially; one CLA hands over to another in a planned manner. The Shelter Cluster has adopted "phased leadership" for natural disasters since 2006. In this model, different agencies lead the cluster during different phases of the response. For example, an agency such as IFRC, which has expertise in emergencies and surge capacity, leads during the emergency and transitional phases, while agencies such as UN-Habitat, which have development expertise, take over during the recovery phase. Other learning can be found within the CCCM cluster.

The Education Cluster is co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children at Global level with a jointly-staffed secretariat based in Geneva as well as a jointly-resourced rapid response team. The co-leadership arrangement has been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding and oversight of the Global Cluster is undertaken by a steering group with representation from both organisations. At country level the vast majority of Education Clusters

Annex III: examples of shared leadership

are co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children[58], with the co-leadership arrangement seen as a key strength of the cluster as it underpins the collaborative nature of the cluster approach.

Annex IV: Examples of inter-cluster coordination and linkage between clusters

A. INTER-CLUSTER RESPONSE ISSUES	
INTER-CLUSTER RESPONSE ISSUE	MAIN CLUSTERS POTENTIALLY CONCERNED
Malnutrition	Nutrition, WASH, Food Security, Health
Cholera	Health, WASH, Shelter, CCCM
Host family support	Shelter, WASH, Protection, CCCM and Food Security
Mental health and psycho-social support	Health protection, education
Early recovery strategies - rubble removal	Shelter, Logistics, Protection
Population movement	CCCM, Protection and Potentially all Clusters
Cash transfer programming[59]	Potentially all Clusters

Some global clusters propose checklists to help country clusters identify issues that they need to clarify to avoid gaps or duplication.[60][61]

B. INTER-CLUSTER OPERATIONAL ISSUES	
OPERATIONAL ISSUES	MAIN CLUSTERS POTENTIALLY CONCERNED
Health and hygiene promotion: clarity of roles and synergies, no overlap in content and outreach work.	Health, Nutrition, WASH.
Scheduling distributions, vaccination campaigns, combining these with other interventions.	Food, Health, WASH, Nutrition, Logistics.
Humanitarian access.	Protection and potentially all clusters.
Links with Government.	Potentially all clusters.
Cash transfer programmes. To agree value of cash grants, cash for work rates, links with safety-net structures.	Potentially all clusters.

58   Occasionally (based on available capacity) the cluster is led by only one organisation/agency, also in one or two cases another NGO has taken on the co-leadership role.
59   'Cash transfer programming' refers to cash and voucher-based forms of humanitarian assistance. From an inter-cluster perspective, strategic discussion and decision making on the appropriateness of cash and voucher transfers may take place at all three levels.
60   For more on inter-cluster matrices for WASH and CCCM, Shelter, Health, Nutrition, Early Recovery, and Education, see: http://www.washcluster.info/drupal/?q=technical-library/intercluster-coordination.
61   Protection Cluster mainstreaming trainings are being produced in collaboration with field protection and global clusters and technical support in form of check-lists and work-plans have also been provided for specific clusters such as CCCM, Wash, Shelter, Health and Food Security clusters. For further reference see: http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/protection-mainstreaming.html

Services and activities that support the right environment for effective inter-cluster coordination

INTER-CLUSTER SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	
ENABLERS	INTER-CLUSTER SERVICES/ACTIVITIES
Common standards and approaches	Sphere Core Standards; feedback mechanisms for affected people; needs assessment.
Information management tools	3W/4W database, web platforms, mapping, market information, monitoring.[62]
Needs assessment	Multi-sector/cluster rapid assessments.
Cluster coordination monitoring	Cluster performance monitoring; annual cluster coordination reviews. (of architecture)

Improving links between clusters and HCTs on a strategic level

The table below lists actions that may assist clusters and HCTs to communicate and cooperate effectively in the pursuit of strategic objectives.

EXAMPLES OF HOW CLUSTERS CAN WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH THEIR HCT	
HC or designate chairs inter-cluster coordination meetings on specific issues	Cluster Coordinators influence HCT discussions via their CLA representative
The HC consults Cluster Coordinators and CLAs at specific intervals, for example, at regular monthly meetings	Specific HCT members are assigned to support planning, implementation and monitoring of specific strategic objectives
Specific Cluster Coordinators attend HCT meetings on thematic issues to provide technical and operational expertise	The chair of the inter-cluster coordination group participates in the HCT, to provide a link between the HCT and clusters
Cluster and inter cluster meetings are sequenced, enabling them to feed issues into the HCT's agenda effectively	The HC assigns mentors from the HCT to support Cluster Coordinators (outside their CLAs)
The HCT and inter-cluster meetings share notes of their meetings	HC/HCT members visiting field and meeting with sub-national ICCTs

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62   In support of cash transfer programming, decision making, and monitoring.

Annex V: Cluster coordination performance monitoring

A CCPM process involves four steps and outputs:

STEPS

| 1. Planning | 2. Surveys | 3. Analysis & Action planning | 4. Follow-up & Monitoring |

| Decision and Implementation | Preliminary report & Cluster description | Final report & Action plan | Quarterly reports to the HCT |

OUTPUTS

Step 1 - Planning

- The HCT meets to discuss the purpose and agree on implementation of a CCPM process. It proposes a timeframe for implementation.

- The Inter-cluster Coordination Group meets to discuss the CCPM process and its objectives. It decides whether only national or also sub-national levels will be involved, agrees on the timeline, and allocates roles and responsibilities for the process.

- Individual clusters meet with partners to discuss the objectives, and clarify the different steps and processes involved.[63]

Step 2 - CCPM Survey

- The Cluster Coordinator completes a cluster description survey (online[64]).

- The Cluster Coordinator and cluster partners each complete separate (online) feedback questionnaires (20-30 minutes).

- Global Clusters[65] use an automated system[66] to compile survey data and produce a Cluster Description Report with information on the cluster' structures and on the availability of key outputs linked to the cluster functions, and a Preliminary Cluster Coordination Performance Report which includes a colour coded analysis of the six core functions and on accountability to affected population (illustrated in extract below). This preliminary performance analysis is a snap shot, and primarily serves to focus the discussion with partners to agree on an action plan for strengthening the clusters performance.

Step 3 – Cluster Analysis and Action Planning

- In a half or full day workshop, each cluster discusses the cluster description and the survey results (and any related questions), identifies mitigating factors and explanations of performance and agrees on specific corrective actions that will be taken, including request for support as indicated. The Performance Report and an Action Plan are then finalized with the additional information and shared with stakeholders.

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63   A template presentation is available to facilitate this meeting http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info.
64   The online tool has been stressed as perhaps the most efficient means of completing the survey, but other ways are acceptable if clusters/coordinators wish to include additional questions and/or use an alternative tool. As long as the agreed-to reporting format is followed any survey approach is acceptable.
65   Or OCHA HQ if a global cluster has yet to integrated the survey system.
66   If alternative approaches are adopted, cluster in country are expected to compile the survey results.

Extract of a Cluster Coordination Preliminary Performance Response:

1. Supporting service delivery	
1.1 Provide a platform to ensure that service delivery is driven by the agreed strategic priorities	Good
1.2 Develop mechanisms to eliminate duplication of service delivery	Unsatisfactory
2. Informing strategic decision-making of the HC/HCT for the humanitarian response	
2.1 Needs assessment and gap analysis (across other sectors and within the sector)	Satisfactory
2.2 Analysis to identify and address (emerging) gaps, obstacles, duplication, and cross-cutting issues.	Weak
2.3 Priotitization, grounded in response analysis	Satisfacory

Step 4 - Follow-up and Monitoring

- The Inter-Cluster Coordination Group reviews the final Cluster Coordination Performance Reports and Action Plans and identifies common weaknesses across clusters that need to be addressed systematically.

- The Coordination Performance Reports and Action Plans are presented to the HCT to agree which actions require their support and to Global Clusters to identify individual cluster support requirements.

- Each cluster monitors the implementation of its Action Plan at regular intervals.

- Clusters report every quarter to the HCT on respective progress and challenges.

The timeframe of a CCPM exercise is determined by the HC/HCT and agreed by clusters. It can be short, however, in more protracted situations at least one month is recommended. This provides sufficient time to plan, issue and allow partners to complete the cluster description, the questionnaire, compile the Preliminary Cluster Coordination Performance Report, hold cluster discussions, and develop and present an agreed Action Plan.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to Affected People
AOR	Areas of Responsibility
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CLA	Cluster Lead Agency
CPM	Cluster Performance Monitoring
CP	Contingency Planning
ECHA	Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
EW	Early Warning
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IARRM	Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCT	Inter Cluster Coordination Teams
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM	Information Management
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MPA	Minimum Preparedness Action
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MIRA	Multi Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
POLR	Provider of Last Resort
RC	Resident Coordinator
SC	Steering Committee
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SWG	Sub Working Group
TA	IASC Transformative Agenda
TOR	Terms of Reference
TWiG/TWG	Technical Working Group
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDOCO	UN Development Operations Coordination Office
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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