

OCHA's Role in Supporting the Implementation of the Cluster Approach

*This document is a supplement to the IASC Guidance Note on Implementation of the Cluster Leadership Approach at the Country Level and the Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at the Country Level. Its purpose is to provide OCHA staff with specific, **preliminary guidance** on carrying out their role in support of the cluster approach at the field level. It should also help the OCHA field offices to answer frequently asked questions from partners. For more information, OCHA Field Offices are invited to contact their Desk Officer and to visit the IASC web site (<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc>).*

What is the Humanitarian Reform Agenda?

The Humanitarian Reform Agenda is about enhancing **accountability, predictability, and partnership** in humanitarian response. It includes three main areas of focus: (1) the cluster approach, (2) improving the adequacy, timeliness and flexibility of humanitarian financing (of which the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is one element) and (3) strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator system. Separate guidance on the CERF and HC system will be available shortly.

The objectives of the cluster approach are outlined in the *IASC Guidance Note on Implementation of the Cluster Leadership Approach at the Country Level*, to be released shortly.

What is the intended added value of the cluster approach in the field?

First, the cluster approach identifies predictable leadership in nine key gap sectors/areas of response: Water and Sanitation, Nutrition, Logistics, Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management, Shelter, Health, Early Recovery and Telecommunications. Cluster leads will be responsible for ensuring that activities are carried out in collaboration with partners, and will act as the "provider of last resort", in line with the *IASC Generic ToR for Cluster Leads*.

Second, the cluster approach is designed around the concept of 'partnerships' (i.e. 'clusters') between UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement, international organizations and NGOs in critical gap areas of humanitarian operations. The partners work together towards agreed common humanitarian objectives.

Third, the approach strengthens accountability to the HC. Cluster leads, in addition to their normal institutional responsibilities, are accountable to the HC for fulfilling agreed roles and responsibilities for cluster leadership, such as those listed in the *IASC Generic ToR for Cluster Leads at the Country Level*.

Fourth, the approach should help to improve strategic field-level coordination and prioritization by placing responsibility for leadership and coordination of specific sectors with the competent operational agency.

Where will the cluster approach be implemented?

The cluster approach will be applied to all new major disasters and contingency plans for potential emergencies in 2006. For ongoing emergencies, IASC country teams may choose to implement the cluster approach where they feel it will add value to the humanitarian response. If current arrangements in ongoing emergencies are considered to be working well, there is no need to change.

For successful implementation of the cluster approach a necessary amount of flexibility has to be built in, so each country programme can shape the approach and make it work for its unique situation while respecting the basic principles of the approach, namely accountability, predictability and partnership. Accomplishment will depend to a large part on the leadership of the HC, with support from an effective OCHA office.

What is OCHA's Role?

OCHA is expected to be the **engine of humanitarian reform**. An immediate priority for OCHA is to provide clarity and guidance on the reform process and ensure the consistency of approach required for successful implementation.

Once it is agreed that the cluster approach will be applied in a given crisis, OCHA will support the HC and the IASC Country Team to put in place the necessary architecture to make it work. OCHA's activities in this regard include, but are not limited to:

- Support the creation of clusters by ensuring they are familiar with the *IASC Generic ToRs for Cluster Leads at the Country Level*; are representative of key stakeholders; and develop a plan of work and adhere to it.
- Ensure that coordination structures take into account coordination needs at all levels (i.e. national, regional, district, etc.), and respect the principles of greater accountability, predictability and partnership.
- Ensure that inter-cluster information sharing and decision-making mechanisms are agreed upon.
- Provide guidance, support, and advice to cluster leads and their participants to help them carry out their functions, particularly on issues related to coordinating the cluster, process management within the cluster, etc.

The cluster approach will require more sophisticated coordination among a wider range of partners. The demands for common systems and services will be greater. Thus, **the reform provides OCHA with the opportunity to focus on its core competencies: coordination, information management, advocacy and resource mobilisation, and policy development.**

OCHA will continue to play a critical role in supporting the HC and the IASC Country Team in establishing, on the basis of cluster and/or sector plans, the overarching priorities and direction for the humanitarian response, and ensuring that all clusters are aware of HC and IASC Country Team agreements in this regard.

OCHA will play a crucial role in ensuring - and often spearheading - cross-cluster coordination, supporting the HC to ensure a coherent response, and providing field-based cluster leads with the inter-agency tools, policy and guidance they may need to effectively implement the *IASC Generic ToR for Cluster Leads*. It may be helpful to view OCHA's role as providing technical coordination support services as well as advice to cluster leads so as to ensure that roles and responsibilities are properly understood and cross-cutting concerns are addressed effectively. However, it is not OCHA's role to manage individual clusters or to provide secretarial support, even when cluster leads are not fulfilling their responsibilities. With reference to the *IASC Generic ToR for Cluster Leads*, below are some practical activities and guidance to OCHA field offices for supporting the HC and cluster leads:

1. Coordination

Identify Key Partners: With the HC, foster the development of an IASC Country Team and cluster groups. Work with NGOs, the Red Cross/Crescent movement, and non-UN agencies to agree on mechanisms for participating in clusters and IASC country team meetings. Help cluster leads identify and engage with all relevant partners, including all actors with expertise and/or programmes in specific sectors. Make full use of OCHA's established networks and WWW contact databases to promote inclusion and partnership.

Build cross-cluster linkages: Ensure that there is a forum for cluster leads to meet and discuss strategic "big picture" as well as operational issues of mutual concern and that there is an effective mechanism for information exchange between clusters. Maintain an overview of what is happening in each cluster and identify and facilitate linkages to ensure a coherent humanitarian response.

Facilitate and ensure cross-cluster strategic planning and assessment processes: Continue to support the HC to manage inter-agency planning processes, such as the development of the CHAP, the preparation of the Consolidated Appeal, contingency planning, multi-sectoral needs assessments,

analysis and monitoring (NB these tools are being modified to be coherent with the cluster approach). Work with clusters to ensure linkages between preparedness and early warning, emergency response and longer-term recovery and development strategies. Provide cluster leads with tools, guidelines and lessons learned to assist them in managing their respective clusters and producing outputs that feed into overall planning processes.

Mainstream cross-cutting issues: Disseminate and advocate the adherence to IASC policies for mainstreaming issues such as protection, human rights, HIV/AIDS, gender, and SGBV.

2. Information Management

Cluster leads are increasingly looking to OCHA to provide the lead on information management activities and structures to support cluster implementation. Various tools and services can be used to improve information management as a support tool for effective coordination. For OCHA this is a relatively new area of work, with information management expertise now being mainstreamed into OCHA field offices under the 2004 SMT approved Information Management Strategy (see <http://ochaonline2.un.org/intranet>), and provided as surge capacity support to the humanitarian community in new large-scale emergencies through the deployment of the Humanitarian Information Centre as a Humanitarian Common Service. In specific terms OCHA's role is to ensure that information is managed so as to inform decision makers at all levels of coordination (strategic, cluster/sector level and at the operational level) through activities such as:

- Using OCHA's generic information management tools (Who, What, Where (W3) database and Contact Directory).
- Using of the Maps-on-Demand facility to support geographic information services (mapping).
- Establishing an OCHA website as the backbone of information dissemination locally.
- Deploying an HIC when requested by the IASC country team through the HC when required and provided the conditions for deployment are met.
- Supporting information management activities by cluster lead agencies by deployed/in situ information management officers, including adaptation of standards for the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of data to the locally agreed environment.

3. Advocacy and Resource Mobilization

The cluster approach reinforces the need for OCHA to work with partners to identify key, common advocacy concerns and support the HC in developing and implementing inter-agency advocacy strategies. OCHA should continue to seize opportunities for advocacy and resource mobilization (e.g. reports to the Security Council, media and donor missions, etc.). In addition, OCHA should advocate for donors to fund cluster members to carry out priority activities in the sector concerned, and promote the consistent involvement of donor representatives in the full program and planning cycle. OCHA Field Offices should be fully familiar with all UN and IASC funding mechanisms and be able to advise cluster leads accordingly (e.g. CERF, Flash Appeal, OCHA Grant, Consolidated Appeals).

4. Policy Guidance, Dissemination and Training

To ensure a principled and coherent implementation of the cluster approach OCHA should disseminate and advocate for the respect and safeguarding of humanitarian principles as well as the application of established and agreed upon humanitarian policies, as defined in international humanitarian law, the Sphere Standards, the Guiding Principles on IDPs, the Code of Conduct, etc. and established humanitarian policies and standards. Cluster leads are responsible for upholding and monitoring the application of humanitarian policies and technical standards relating to the work within the clusters. Promote and disseminate policy and guidance related to the cluster approach, and the wider humanitarian reform. Promote and support training of humanitarian personnel on the cluster approach; including through existing training courses such as UNDAC and CMCOORD.