Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level
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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.

It is to be understood, at the same time, that 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 and includes field and global inputs. Two new chapters, on Clusters and Sectors, and the Role of Clusters in Preparedness, have been added. Three chapters have been significantly updated: Transition and Deactivation 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://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/.

First endorsed by: IASC Working Group on 31 August 2012.
This *Cluster Coordination Reference Module*\(^1\) outlines the basic elements of cluster coordination in non-refugee situations.\(^2\) It was compiled in response to the IASC’s request to create a reference guide for practitioners that would facilitate their work and improve humanitarian outcomes. The module is one of the Transformative Agenda Protocols. It outlines key concepts and draws attention to relevant guidance. It will be reviewed periodically to take account of feedback from the field. Additional learning around the themes covered in this module will be available online.\(^3\)

The IASC Principals reviewed humanitarian responses to several major disasters in 2010 and 2011 and pinpointed many shortcomings. Building on the 2005 Humanitarian Reform, they agreed to a set of actions in December 2011, referred to as the **IASC Transformative Agenda** (ITA). It focuses on improving, simplifying and clarifying the following:

1. Leadership  
2. Accountability  
3. Preparedness  
4. Coordination  
5. Humanitarian Programme Cycle Components

This module covers key issues of cluster coordination that the ITA identified. Though it was drafted to address Level 3 (L3) emergencies, most of the ITA also applies in non-L3 situations and this is particularly true of cluster coordination. Protocols that describe other components of the ITA can be found on the IASC website.\(^4\)

Accountability to affected populations is the overarching objective of the ITA. In December 2011, the IASC Principals agreed to integrate commitments to accountability to affected people into their individual agencies’ policies and operational guidelines. An Operational Framework on Accountability to Affected Populations was also endorsed to determine participation, information provision, feedback and complaints handling with affected people at the country level.\(^5\)

Coordination is a means to an end. The ITA affirms that the humanitarian community’s ultimate aim is to serve vulnerable people effectively, and that it should hold itself accountable to them for its performance. Accordingly, international coordination arrangements should fit the operational context, and support national coordination efforts.\(^6\) The objective should be to direct as many resources as possible to meet humanitarian needs in a timely and predictable manner. Developing or duplicative forms of coordination should be avoided; it is not necessary to activate all clusters in every response. **When activation is considered, existing in-country coordination mechanisms should be taken into account.**

The ITA recognizes that Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), Resident Coordinators (RCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) should be empowered to make decisions at country level, in dialogue with national authorities. This module focuses on the cluster approach, the principal tool available to the international community for coordinating its

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\(^1\) The module should be used alongside other guidance prepared under the IASC Transformative Agenda. [do you need to add key references here?]

\(^2\) UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international responses to refugee needs. Clusters are not established in that context.

\(^3\) At: [http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info](http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info).


\(^6\) For work with national structures, see IASC, *Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities*, July 2011.
response and accounting for it. However, the leadership of humanitarian country teams at country level are responsible for devising the most appropriate coordination solutions, taking into account the operational context.
1 Cluster and Sector Coordination

Cluster coordination ensures that international responses to humanitarian emergencies are clearly led and accountable. By this means, it aims to make the international humanitarian community a better partner for affected people.

The humanitarian community is accountable to a range of stakeholders, including national governments, but it is primarily accountable to affected populations. The principal objective of international humanitarian action, and the purpose of coordination, are to meet the needs of affected people by means that are reliable, effective, inclusive, and respect humanitarian principles. Agencies co-ordinate in a range of contexts and a variety of coordination mechanisms may be called ‘clusters’. This section examines the role of clusters that are formally activated in the context of emergencies. It does not examine development coordination or emergency coordination in general.

Formally activated clusters9 are a temporary coordination solution. They are created when existing coordination mechanisms are overwhelmed or constrained in their ability to respond to identified needs in line with humanitarian principles. A cluster is accountable to the Humanitarian Co-ordinator (HC) through the Cluster Lead Agency as well as to national authorities.

Emergency sectoral coordination mechanisms, for the purposes of this description, are led by Governments and report to designated Government bodies. The lifespan of crisis-sector coordination is defined by Government policy or declaration. International humanitarian support can augment this national capacity underpinned by the principles of the cluster approach.

The name of a coordination mechanism does not matter, but a formally activated cluster has specific characteristics and accountabilities. This said, regardless of which mechanism is chosen, the needs that coordination must address and the coordination functions in emergencies are the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordination Mechanism</th>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Recovery Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government has coordination capacity.</td>
<td>Government provides leadership. International partners can provide support to the coordination capacity</td>
<td>Government leadership continues. Humanitarian coordination structures may transition to recovery and development structures. International actors withdraw or deliver support for recovery, including assistance to prepare for future crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government coordination capacity is limited.</td>
<td>Clusters are activated where needed. Where possible, co-leadership with Government bodies and NGO partners is strongly encouraged.</td>
<td>Clusters are deactivated or transition to pre-existing national crisis coordination or to recovery and development coordination structures, where possible. Government sector crisis coordination is strengthened, where possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 Defining cluster and emergency sectoral coordination


9 Clusters should be activated following procedures described in Section 2 on Cluster Activation.

10 Mechanisms are considered “overwhelmed” when the scale of need, number of actors or a multi-sectoral approach is required, and current structures cannot cope. ‘Constrained’ or the response will fail to meet humanitarian principles. [CHECK EDIT.]

11 See Section 2 on Cluster Activation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activated Clusters continue. Additional clusters may be activated, after review of coordination and response needs. Their capacity may be augmented as needed.</th>
<th>Deactivate, or transition to pre-crisis cluster structure. Strengthen government sector crisis coordination where possible.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The table below shows compares the characteristics of activated Clusters and Sectoral Crisis Coordination

A decision to activate appropriate clusters is considered when a Government’s capacity to coordinate is limited or constrained, though it is important to note that additional international coordination capacity may be valuable even when a Government is in a position to lead the response and its coordination. When clusters are activated, deactivation and transition strategies should be considered as soon as possible. (See Section 2 on Activation, and Section 3 on Transition and Deactivation of Clusters.)

Formal activation may be difficult to implement in many circumstances where Government capacity is constrained. Different ways of augmenting coordination and response capacity may therefore need to be found. They should still be underpinned by the principles of the cluster approach.

When a cluster is not activated, it does not mean that the sector concerned is not a priority. It implies that the Government is leading coordination in that sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Activated Cluster</th>
<th>Sectoral Crisis Coordination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A designated Cluster Lead Agencies leads and manages the cluster. Where possible, it does so in co-leadership with Government bodies and NGOs. Strong links should be established 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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Accountability | Cluster Lead Agencies are accountable to the HC and ERC, as well as to the national authorities and affected people, for a cluster’s performance. Performance is measured in terms of needs met, achievement of SRP objectives, 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) | Depending on access, security and the availability of funding, a cluster lead agency must be ready when necessary to act as provider of last resort, by delivering services required to fill critical gaps identified by the cluster and reflected in the HC-led HCT Strategic Response Plan (revision to 2008 definition underlined). Res. 46/182 notwithstanding.14 | 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.14 |

| Lifespan | Activated clusters are temporary and subject | Long term; structures are |

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12 This may be the case, for example, when a government is not willing to act, or where duty bearers are parties to a conflict.

13 Governments still have primary responsibility during the activation of clusters but there are additional accountabilities which operate during the activation of clusters. (WHY IS THIS NOTE UNDERLINED AND IN RED FONT? The meaning of the note is also unclear. Please clarify. PS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mainstreaming of protection, early recovery strategies, and cross-cutting issues</strong></th>
<th><strong>Recovery phase</strong></th>
<th><strong>Human resources for coordination</strong></th>
<th><strong>Technical support</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role of Global Clusters in preparedness</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The cluster lead agency is responsible for ensuring that protection and early recovery strategies, and cross-cutting issues, are mainstreamed into programming.</td>
<td>Clusters are deactivated or transition to pre-existing national crisis coordination, or to recovery and development coordination structures, where possible. Government sector crisis coordination is strengthened, where possible.</td>
<td>The Cluster Lead Agency will provide cluster staff to meet needs, including the need for coordination and information management.</td>
<td>Relevant cluster members or the CLA in-country, or the Global Cluster, may provide technical support and guidance.</td>
<td>Global clusters do not restrict their support to formally activated clusters. They may support other humanitarian coordination and response structures, if there is a high level of risk. IASC Emergency Directors Group assess the risk, using the IASC’s Early Warning Early Action Report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined by the Government.</td>
<td>Government leadership continues. Humanitarian coordination structures may transition to recovery and development structures. International actors withdraw or deliver support for recovery, including assistance to prepare for future crises.</td>
<td>Government bodies are responsible for ensuring that sufficient coordination capacity is available.</td>
<td>In-country agencies or the relevant global cluster may provide technical support and guidance as needed, when capacity and resources allow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Cluster Activation

Cluster activation occurs when the HCT decides to establish clusters as part of an international emergency response, after consulting national partners. The decision is based on an analysis of humanitarian need and coordination capacity on the ground.\(^\text{16}\)

The IASC Principals agreed that activation of clusters should be \textit{strategic, should not be automatic, and should be time limited}. An HC should recommend the activation of clusters only when an identified coordination need is not being addressed.\(^\text{17}\) The ideal approach is to support sectoral crisis coordination through \textit{national} mechanisms. Decisions on whether to activate a cluster should consider existing crisis coordination mechanisms.

Decisions to formally activate clusters, when capacity is limited or constrained, are designed to provide clear leadership and accountability in the key sectors of an international humanitarian response. The intention is to strengthen rather than to replace sectoral coordination, under the overall leadership of the HC, and to improve international coordination in support of the national response. To ensure that clusters continue to operate only for the time that they are strictly needed, plans to deactivate and transition clusters should be prepared as soon as possible (see section 3). Building the capacity of local partners and government should be an objective from the outset. Formal activation may be difficult to implement in many circumstances where Government capacity is constrained.\(^\text{18}\) Different ways of augmenting coordination and response capacity may therefore need to be found. They should still be underpinned by the principles of the cluster approach.

When a cluster is not activated, it does not mean that the sector concerned is not a priority. It implies that the Government is leading coordination in that sector.

The criteria for cluster activation are met when:

1. A sharp deterioration or significant change in the humanitarian situation leads to response and coordination gaps.
2. Existing national response or coordination capacity is unable to meet needs in a manner that respects humanitarian principles (because of the scale of need, the number of actors, the need for a multi-sectoral approach, other obstacles, etc.).

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

1. The RC/HC agrees with the HCT or UNCT which clusters should be activated, based on preparedness planning.\(^\text{19}\) In each case, the decision should be based on a clear rationale and take into account needs and national coordination capacity.
2. The RC or HC, CLAs and OCHA consult national authorities, to establish what coordination mechanisms for humanitarian response exist, and their capacity.\(^\text{20}\)
3. Global Cluster Lead Agencies are alerted by their representatives in the country, before the HCT meets to discuss activation, to ensure that they can be represented appropriately during the discussion.

\(^{16}\) Depending on context, this decision may be made by the UNCT or an expanded UNCT.
\(^{17}\) The RC makes this commendation when no HC is in post.
\(^{18}\) This may be the case, for example, when a government is not willing to act, or where duty bearers are parties to a conflict.
\(^{19}\) See Section 6 on the Role of Clusters in Preparedness.
\(^{20}\) Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working. [CHECK: IS THIS REFERENCE COMPLETE? PS]
4. In consultation with the HCT, the RC/HC selects Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs) based on the coordination and response capacity of agencies, their location and operational presence, and their 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. Shared leadership should be considered (including with NGOs).

5. On reaching agreement in the HCT, the RC/HC writes to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). The document outlines the recommended cluster arrangements, suggests CLAs, and presents a rationale for the clusters selected for activation. If other coordination solutions outside the cluster have been agreed, these are also outlined.

6. The ERC transmits the proposal to the IASC Principals, Emergency Directors Group and Global Cluster Lead and Co-Lead Agencies for approval within 24 hours, and informs the RC/HC accordingly. The Emergency Directors may be called upon to discuss further where deemed necessary.

7. Once approved, the RC/HC informs relevant partners of the agreed clusters and lead agencies.

When activation discussions occur, Global clusters should be informed as early as possible, to ensure that decisions take account of the most recent developments.

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

Thematic early recovery issues (such as emergency employment, community infrastructure, restoration of local government) may not be covered by existing clusters or alternative mechanisms. When this is so, the RC/HC may recommend that a specific cluster is established in addition to the inter-Cluster coordination of early recovery.

IASC agencies undertake to:
- Maintain a roster of senior experienced staff, who are qualified to work in L3 crises and can be deployed rapidly.
- Deploy rostered staff effectively and in a timely manner.
- Employ their capacity to support the HCT in defining and implementing the humanitarian response.

This commitment is called the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM). It should be noted that the IARRM is a composite of the individual rapid response capacities of agencies; it is not a stand-alone integrated team.

Activation of the IARRM does not imply activation of all or any clusters. It is a resource that the HCT may use to advise it on coordination capacity in a sector and on whether clusters should be activated. Final responsibility for activating clusters rests with the RC/HC in consultation with the HCT.

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21 In the case of ‘service clusters’ (Logistics and Emergency Telecommunications) the selection of the Cluster Lead Agency normally mirrors global arrangements because service clusters require technical expertise that other agencies cannot be presumed to possess. (CHECK: I DI-D NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS SENTENCE MEANT. WHAT DOES “NORMALLY MIRRORS GLOBAL ARRANGEMENTS” MEAN?)
3 Cluster Transition and Deactivation

Cluster de-activation is the closure of a formally activated cluster. Deactivation includes the transfer of core functions (in line with the Cluster Reference Module) from clusters that have international leadership and accountability to sectors or structures that are led nationally.\(^{22}\) Functions may be transferred to existing or pre-crisis coordination and response structures, or new ones.

Cluster transition refers to the process (and potentially activities) by means of which the transfer of leadership and accountabilities is planned and implemented, leading to deactivation. A plan is required to map phases in the transition, set transition or deactivation benchmarks for each phase, and schedule activities to meet them. In the course of transition, some clusters may merge.

As noted in Section 2, a cluster is timebound and is not formed automatically; it is created to fill a specific coordination gap in a humanitarian response, and should dissolve when that gap no longer exists. It is therefore important to review the need for clusters regularly, both to respect humanitarian principles and promote forms of humanitarian action and coordination that, wherever possible, are led nationally.

Periodic reviews of the cluster architecture ensure that clusters adapt to changing circumstances and remain light, efficient, effective and fit for purpose.\(^{21}\) They also make sure that clusters make timely plans to transfer leadership and accountabilities to national or other structures; and design transition processes and, where necessary, activities to build capacity in relevant areas.

To justify de-activation of formally activated clusters, at least one of the conditions that led to the activation of a cluster must therefore occur:

1. The humanitarian situation improved, with significantly decreased humanitarian need
2. .
3. The capacity of national structures to coordinate and meet residual humanitarian needs in line with humanitarian principles is now adequate or has been increased.

Decisions are made by the HCT at country level, against agreed benchmarks and in consultation with national authorities.

Five principles should guide and inform transition and de-activation processes:

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

2. They focus on the ability to lead and be accountable for cluster functions (as defined by this module) in line with humanitarian principles, and on residual humanitarian needs. Cluster functions can also be used to prepare capacity-building measures. While the HC, HCT and CLAs continue to operate, they are responsible for ensuring that preparedness actions are carried out (as outlined in Section 6, Role of Clusters in Preparedness).

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\(^{22}\) De-activation can transfer of leadership and accountabilities to other internationally supported mechanisms.

\(^{23}\) For frequency of reviews, see below: “When does deactivation planning take place?”
3. **They are based on assessment of national capacity**, including:
   - The presence, structure and resources of relevant response and coordination mechanisms. Some clusters will be in a position to hand over to more natural counterparts than others, making transition easier and potentially faster.
   - The scale of residual or continued humanitarian needs and the ability of successor mechanisms to respond in accordance with humanitarian principles.

4. **They take account of the context.** De-activation in sudden onset crises may be more rapid than in complex or protracted emergencies.
   - Not all clusters must be de-activated at the same time; the timing of de-activation is related to ongoing need and the presence or absence of national structures competent to manage the functions in question.
   - The functions of some clusters (for example, protection or WASH) are likely to be transferred to a range of national structures.
   - 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.
   - De-activation can also be induced by a Government declaration that an emergency is over, shifting the focus to recovery and coordination structures for development.

5. **They are guided by early recovery 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.** Merging can be considered when it will bring evident benefits or will fill gaps in Government capacity. Merging may reduce the range of needs for which a cluster has responsibility, reduce the number of partners, create a more stable platform for meeting residual needs, or strengthen links with another cluster. Examples have included health and nutrition, and food security and nutrition.

De-activation of a cluster does not mean that humanitarian financing is no longer required. Transitional activities, including capacity-building, can be included in budgets to meet core cluster functions. Financing may be required to enable national and other crisis authorities to coordinate residual or continued humanitarian needs or strengthen preparedness.25

To participate in a humanitarian appeals process, it is not necessary to be a formally activated cluster. Nor is lack of funding a reason to de-activate a cluster.

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25 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 POLR) must be clearly articulated. While a cluster is formally activated, accountability remains with the CLA. Transition plans should outline how accountabilities will shift to Government or to other crisis-coordination mechanisms.

Clusters and sectors continue to be responsible for establishing preparedness, in line with Section 6 on the Role of Clusters in Preparedness.

The table below summarizes the recommendations of ITA Protocols on transition and deactivation of cluster coordination architecture in three different contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Emergency</td>
<td>Within three months: review the cluster coordination architecture to ensure it is “fit for purpose”.</td>
<td>The HC/HCT should ensure that clusters have developed transition or de-activation plans at 90 days after activation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Emergency (Level 3)</td>
<td>(In addition to the above) Within three weeks of an L3 declaration: draft an L3 Exit Strategy.</td>
<td>The HC/HCT should prepare a plan for transitioning out of L3, and report to ERC. It should make plans to replace or demobilize IARRM surge capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protracted Crises</td>
<td>Annually: review the cluster coordination architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose. Do this more often if strategic response plans are revised to allow for adapting to changes in the humanitarian context. Where possible, review ahead of new strategic planning and resource mobilization cycles.</td>
<td>The HC/HCT 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/deactivation plans are updated based on the annual review.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OCHA? ERC? will coordinate with HC/RCs to ensure timely reviews of cluster coordination architecture.

Good practice suggests that the HC/HCT, clusters and national authorities should develop transition and deactivation strategies from the onset of a response. Some 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 to national development objectives and include the strengthening of national preparedness and response capacity.
3. Where possible, consider co-leadership of clusters with national authorities during the activation process or as early as possible.
4. A review can lead to activation of new clusters or merging of existing clusters.

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26 In line with agreed accountabilities detailed in cluster approach guidance and CLA ToRs.
27 The process will be clearest with clusters that have obvious Government counterparts, such as education and health. Other clusters may have to work with several Government-led or civil-society mechanisms. Service clusters may not have natural counterparts, but may work with Government or other coordination structures to hand over service provision, or carry out preparedness activities (including national preparedness and response capacity if services are no longer needed). [THE MEANING/INTENT OF THIS PHRASE IS UNCLEAR: CLARIFY -- OR CUT IT?]
28 Including IASC Principals Transformative Agenda Compendium of Agreed Actions, No. 33, December 2011.
30 IASC Principals, Transformative Agenda Compendium of Agreed Actions, No. 33, December 2011.
31 Annual reviews are also mentioned in Section 11, Cluster Coordination Monitoring.
Cluster architecture reviews should:
1. Be initiated by the HC/HCT.
2. Involve cluster lead agencies, cluster partners and national counterparts.
4. Be guided and informed by the five principles outlined above.

The HC/HCT therefore have some room to decide how best to carry out a cluster architecture review. The type and duration of an emergency will influence the degree to which a review needs to be comprehensive and extended, as will initial assessments of national capacity. 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. **OCHA supports the ERC in the global monitoring of reviews of cluster coordination architecture.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When preparing transition and de-activation plans, a cluster should:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Map continued humanitarian preparedness, response and coordination needs (based on the six cluster functions listed in Section 4 of this Module).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify Government or 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Assess the capacity of the mechanisms identified to assume these responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Determine what measures and activities to build capacity may need to be implemented, during transition or to enable deactivation, over what period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Assess whether there are possibilities and benefits for clusters to merge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Define the accountability for cluster functions of CLAs and national counterparts during transition and deactivation, and take steps to ensure accountability is preserved. Include benchmarks to indicate phase transitions towards de-activation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Propose a timetable for transition and/or, if appropriate, merging or de-activation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Propose a timetable for additional cluster reviews as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Decide how preparedness (in line with Section 6 on clusters and preparedness) will be maintained or strengthened after de-activation, and define any continued role for the CLA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a review occurs, Global Clusters support the review process and share lessons learned. They should be involved in planning it 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 current learning is available to inform the review.

When a review has taken place and agreements have been reached on transition plans and any de-activation, the following should happen:
1. Under the HC’s leadership and in close collaboration with national authorities, the HCT notes which clusters have successfully transferred effective coordination responsibilities to national counterparts (Government or other) and recommends deactivation. The rationale for clusters that may still be required is presented during the review process, along with their transition plans.
2. The HC provides the ERC and national authorities with a review summary. This indicates which clusters will transition and be de-activated, what other sectoral coordination mechanisms are in place, and how agency focal points engage with them. It notes the implications for preparedness of the review’s decisions.32

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32 Examples of summary notes to the ERC can be found at: [http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info](http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info).
3. The ERC shares the summary with the IASC Principals, Emergency Directors Group, Global Cluster Lead Agencies, and co-lead agencies, and requests their approval with a minimum of ten days for consultation where rapid response is not necessary.
4. Once approved, the HC informs relevant partners of the arrangements that have been agreed.

4 Cluster Functions
“Coordinators need to spend less time and attention on sophisticated approaches, and devote more time to improving and practicing the basic functions of managing coordination. We need to get back to the fundamentals, and build from there.”

(Valerie Amos, ERC, February 2012)

The IASC Principals “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”. The aim of the cluster approach is 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.

Consequently, the core functions of a cluster at country level are:

1. To support service delivery by
   - Providing a platform for ensuring that service delivery is driven by the SRP 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 sectors).
   - Identifying and finding solutions for (emerging) gaps, obstacles, duplication and cross-cutting issues.
   - Formulating priorities on the basis of analysis.

3. To plan and develop strategy by
   - Developing sectoral plans, objectives and indicators that directly support realization of the response’s strategic priorities.
   - Applying and adhering to standards and guidelines.
   - Clarifying funding requirements, helping to set priorities, and agreeing cluster contributions for the HC’s overall humanitarian funding proposals (Flash Appeals, CAP, CERF, Emergency Response Fund, Common Humanitarian Fund, etc.).

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

5. To build capacity in preparedness and contingency planning (see Section 6).

6. Advocacy

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33 Recommendation 26, IASC, Transformative Agenda: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions, January 2012.
- Identifying concerns that contribute to HC and HCT messaging and action.
- Undertaking advocacy on behalf of the cluster, cluster members, and affected people.

Detailed ToRs list the responsibilities and accountability of Cluster Coordinators, CLAs and HCs. Guidance also exists for HCTs.\(^\text{35}\)

5 Inter-Cluster Coordination

Inter-cluster and intersectoral coordination play a central role in humanitarian responses to emergencies. Cluster coordination should be continuous throughout every phase of the HPC, from needs assessment and development of the SRP to operational programming and evaluation.\(^\text{36}\)

Inter-Cluster coordination ensures that multidisciplinary and cross-cutting issues that cannot be tackled by individual clusters alone, or that call for concerted action, are addressed appropriately; that duplications and gaps between clusters are eliminated; and that synergies are encouraged, to deliver more effective assistance to affected people.

Supported by OCHA, the HC and HCT determine the shape and functions of inter-cluster coordination in particular crises.\(^\text{37}\)

The HCT

- Draws on inter-sectoral information from clusters (as well as government authorities and other sources) when it prepares the SRP and takes strategic decisions on planning, operations and evaluation.
- Relies on inter-sectoral needs assessments to determine the strategic objectives of the response.
- Depends on clusters and cluster coordination to operationalize the SRP and monitor the achievement of strategic objectives.
- Continuously interacts with clusters to achieve transparent resource allocation in support of effective programmes and activities.
- Provides strategic and operational support to clusters across their work to achieve the SRP.

Strategic Objectives

- Relevant clusters and other actors coordinate and form joint working groups to plan, implement and monitor programmes that advance strategic objectives.
- The nature of a strategic objective, and context, determine which clusters will be involved.

\(^{36}\) For the SRP and HPC see Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

\(^{37}\) Cluster Lead Agencies are automatically members of the HCT.
Coordination across all Clusters
Clusters work together on inter-sectoral issues where the achievement of a strategic objective or the SRP concerns all or most clusters, or requires their cooperation to develop outputs and products during the HPC.\(^{38}\)

Inter-cluster coordination helps to identify gaps and avoid duplication, and improves the effectiveness of operations and programmes.

At programme level, inter-cluster coordination is usually implemented through an inter-cluster coordination forum. Via forums, in consultation with partners, Cluster Coordinators identify and raise operational and strategic issues that require inter-cluster support or action by the HC/HCT.

Continuous two-way communication between the HC/HCT and Clusters is central to the HPC, and to operationalization and achievement of strategic objectives.

The work of clusters is facilitated by OCHA (or other HCT members identified by the HC); when it does not facilitate, OCHA must be kept informed because it is responsible for briefing the HC and HCT on progress. OCHA provides direct support, facilitation, and secretariat services to clusters and cluster coordination.

Essentially, inter-cluster coordination requires clusters to work together to maximize synergies, and thereby pursue the shared strategic objectives of the SRP, and the practical coordination of operational issues and activities, in a more efficient and effective way.

Illustrative examples

A. Inter-cluster Strategic Response Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Objective or issue</th>
<th>Main clusters concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cholera.</td>
<td>Health, WASH, Shelter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing reconstruction strategies.</td>
<td>Shelter, WASH, Protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health.</td>
<td>Health protection education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Population movements, camp coordination, management.

Camp coordination and movement cluster.

Cash transfer programming.\(^{40}\)

Potentially all Clusters.

Some global clusters propose checklists to help country clusters identify issues that they need to clarify to avoid gaps or duplication.\(^{41,42}\)

B. Inter-cluster Operational Response Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Issue</th>
<th>Main Clusters Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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\(^{38}\) See Annex 1 for examples.

\(^{39}\) How the Protection Cluster and other sub-clusters (AORs in the field) are represented in inter-cluster fora and processes should be agreed in country. The aim should be to create all the links with other clusters that are required to implement and monitor the response’s strategic objectives effectively. [THIS NOTE IS TOO JARGONIZED TO UNDERSTAND. PLEASE CHECK EDIT. DOES ‘MODALITIES’ REFER TO PEOPLE OR PROCEDURES? PS]

\(^{40}\) Cash transfer programming refers to cash and voucher based forms of humanitarian assistance. Strategic discussions and decision making from an inter-cluster point of view relate to issues of appropriateness and may form part of discussions at all three levels. [I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS. CAN YOU CLARIFY? PS]

\(^{41}\) For more on inter-cluster matrices for WASH and CCCM, Shelter, Health, Nutrition, Early Recovery, and Education, see: www.washcluster.info/drupal/?q=technical-library/intercluster-coordination

\(^{42}\) Protection Cluster mainstreaming reference sheets and trainings are being produced in collaboration with or for CCCM, Wash, Shelter and Food Security clusters and will be available in the Protection Mainstreaming section at: www.globalprotectioncluster.org. [SECTION OF WHAT?? PS]
Health and hygiene promotion: clarity of roles and synergies, no overlap in content and outreach work.

Scheduling distributions, vaccination campaigns, combining these with other interventions.

Humanitarian access.

Links with Government.

Cash transfer programmes. To agree value of cash grants, cash for work rates, links with safety-net structures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enablers</th>
<th>Inter-sectoral Services/Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common standards and approaches.</td>
<td>Sphere Core Standards; feedback mechanisms for affected people; needs assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information management tools.</td>
<td>4W matrix, web platforms, mapping, market information, monitoring.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster coordination monitoring.</td>
<td>Cluster performance monitoring; annual Cluster Coordination Reviews (of architecture).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While OCHA usually provides core support to inter-cluster services and activities that create an enabling environment, clusters may also need to increase their technical capacity to operate and facilitate certain inter-cluster processes and outputs, such as needs assessments and information management.44

Examples of how Clusters can work more closely with their HCT

Experience has shown that mechanisms are not always in place to assist clusters and HCTs to communicate and cooperate effectively. The table below lists actions that may taken to improve communication.

| 1. HC or designate chairs inter-cluster coordination meetings on specific issues. | 6. Cluster Coordinators influence HCT discussions via their CLA representative. |
| 2. The HC consults Cluster Coordinators and CLAs (not as agency) at specific intervals, for example, at regular monthly meetings. | 7. Specific HCT members are assigned to support planning, implementation and monitoring of specific strategic objectives. |
| 3. Specific Cluster Coordinators attend HCT meetings on thematic issues to provide technical and operational expertise. | 8. It is agreed that the chair of the ICC forum will participate in HCT, to provide a link between the HCT and clusters. |
| 4. Cluster and inter-cluster meetings are sequenced, enabling them to feed issues into the HCT’s agenda effectively. | 9. The HC assigns mentors from the HCT to support Cluster Coordinators (outside their CLAs). |
| 5. The HCT and inter-cluster meetings share notes of their meetings. | 10. Inter-cluster Coordinator attends HCT to make linkage between the two groups. |

43 In support of cash transfer programming, decision making, and monitoring.
OCHA provides appropriate levels of capacity to support inter-cluster coordination, as determined by the HC/HCT. It:

- Supports and facilitates inter-cluster coordination at all three levels (HCT, strategic objectives, and ICC), and will set up and support inter-cluster coordination forums or mechanisms that are agreed by the HC/HCT.
- Ensures 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 forums.
- Assists clusters to deliver components of the humanitarian programme cycle. (Examples include coordinated multi-sectoral needs assessments, analysis and recommendations for prioritization, and the strategic response plan (see Annex 1).)
- Ensures and supports inter-cluster coordination to plan and implement specific strategic objectives.
- Assists and requires clusters 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). May identify specialist support in consultation with the cluster lead agency in country.
- Supports efforts to ensure that protection and early recovery inform all stages of the HPC and SRP.
- Assists clusters to identify and develop advocacy issues and initiatives on strategic and operational issues; brings them to the attention of the HC/HCT.
- Informs the HC/HCT of operational progress and any issues that may require their input, advocacy or other support.45
- Assists HC/HCT to define and put appropriate coordination mechanisms in place at all levels, including decentralized coordination via sub-national clusters or sectors in zones of operational importance.
- Works with the HC/HCT and clusters to ensure that inter-cluster coordination remains responsive to changes in the operating environment.
- Supports and facilitates monitoring of cluster coordination and performance, and cluster architecture; ensures that the HC/HCT reviews the architecture of cluster coordination regularly (see Section 11 on Cluster Coordination Monitoring).
- Supports agreement on common standards, tools and services (including service clusters), to create a conducive strategic and operational environment for clusters.
- Supports links between humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms.
- Provides inter-cluster information management tools and coordination as needed.
- Facilitates and supports pooled and common humanitarian fund mechanisms.

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45 Support to the HC/HCT should be reinforced by CLAs on the HCT.
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 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.

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 capacity to respond during a crisis, when conditions deteriorate or new shocks occur. In practical terms, it requires country teams to:

- Identify key elements in the humanitarian programme cycle that require preparation in advance.
- Analyse and address anticipated problems.
- Establish good working relationships with national authorities, accept their leadership where appropriate, and take full account of their preparedness arrangements.
- Establish good working relationships with other partners whose cooperation will be critical when managing the response.
- Reinforce coordination structures that will be used during a humanitarian response.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of different members of the humanitarian community, including responsibilities vis-à-vis national authorities.

The Emergency Response Preparedness Approach

The IASC Strategic Working Group on Preparedness has developed guidance on ERP, which replaces the Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance (2007). Additional detailed guidance is expected from the IASC by early 2014. The purpose of the ERP is to promote a systematic, coherent approach to emergency planning and risk that readies IASC humanitarian actors for rapid response.

The ERP Approach has five components

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian actors need to develop a clearly framed and shared understanding of risks that may trigger a crisis requiring a coordinated humanitarian response.</td>
<td>When a Country Risk Profile has been developed, it is vital to monitor the risks and situation, using clear indicators and</td>
<td>MPAs focus on the main elements of the HPC and identify the steps that must be taken in advance to ensure an effective response when a crisis occurs. MPAs should be tailored to the needs, structure and mandates of each cluster, and make arrangements in the following areas:</td>
<td>A CRP should be developed when a crisis appears to be imminent, or a sudden high impact risk is detected. It should have the same form as the SRP so that responders can move seamlessly</td>
<td>SOPs based on humanitarian coordination structures guide the initial emergency response and assist rapid decision-making and action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46 A full explanation of ERP, with guidance and templates, can be found at: www.humanitarianresponse.info/emergency-response-preparedness.org.
Where ERP actions are to be implemented, country teams should monitor the quality of risk profiling, EW, MPAs, SOPs and CRPs, and assess whether these tasks have been completed, disseminated and understood by the relevant actors.

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 should be more integrated and developed. Under the HC’s leadership, clusters/sectors should be contributing to implementation of all five 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.** In these countries, clusters may not have been activated formally, but sectoral coordination mechanisms (thematic groups, informal clusters, sectoral roundtables) are likely to be active, in liaison with Government counterparts. Where sector partners do not have emergency response experience, preparedness actions may be more challenging or take longer to implement; Government will have developed good preparedness, response and coordination arrangements in some sectors. Under the guidance of the RC and in close cooperation with Government, sector coordination mechanisms should help to operationalize relevant parts of the five components of the ERP Approach. Global Clusters should proactively support the RC and sector coordination mechanisms, encourage and support operationalization of the ERPs, and prioritize immediate implementation of MPAs.

**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 clusters. The RC should promote coordination and preparedness actions in relevant sectors, using the risk profile, and bring together thematic groups and Government counterparts to plan how they will cooperate in the event of a crisis. Sectors should prioritize the implementation of MPAs. Global Clusters are not expected to provide assistance unless specifically requested by the RC.

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47 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).
7 Cluster Management Arrangements

This section covers the organization and coordination of the various cluster components (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 the need for leadership in an emergency. Key decisions need to have legitimacy and to be taken by a manageable number of partners.

A well-run cluster is a formal deliverable of the CLA and forms part of that agency’s work. However, in practice the IASC and donors have recognized that the efficient management or functioning of clusters is a joint responsibility of the CLA, the Cluster Coordinator, resourcing partners and all participants in national and sub-national clusters.

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

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.

During an emergency, clusters are expected to cooperate with national authorities, accept their leadership, and support national capacity wherever it is feasible and appropriate.

Efficient cluster management should:

- Monitor performance of the six core cluster functions (see Section 4), making sure that developing programmes clearly contribute to the implementation of evidence-based strategic objectives and are based on sound field practices and agreed international benchmarks and standards.
- Establish and maintain an appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanism, which:
  - Strengthens pre-existing sectoral coordination by increasing predictability and accountability.
  - Builds 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.
- Maintain the cluster’s responsiveness to changes in the operating environment and in requirements, capacity, and participation.
- Ensure that information is effectively transferred between cluster members and to and from other stakeholders, and is well used.
- Cooperate with other clusters (including through inter-cluster coordination forums) and 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 by means of feedback mechanisms that are inclusive and consultative.

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48 Reflecting the ToRs of CLAs.
49 See Section 8 on general commitments for participation in clusters.
There is no single approach to cluster management. Because disasters (and clusters) the vary in scale and complexity, the management of clusters must be adapted to the situation, and may need to change as a response evolves.

On the basis of experience, nevertheless, the IASC has approved several models of cluster management. In 2011, 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, as has been implemented by some clusters at country level”.  

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 interact with its broader cluster membership to ensure a regular flow of information.

**SAG Member/Invitee Options**

### Possible SAG Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Level</th>
<th>Sub-National Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cluster Coordinator.</td>
<td>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 the national SAG and often includes more representatives of local authorities and NGO partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government (technical) representatives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• National NGO technical experts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• International NGO technical experts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement technical experts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• UN agency technical experts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• OCHA (inter-cluster).</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Potential Invitees (as appropriate)

- Sub-national cluster focal points.
- Donor representatives.
- Regional focal points with technical expertise based at a regional level.
- Military representatives and other authorities, as appropriate.

**Technical Working Groups**

Technical Working Groups (TWiGs or TWGs) are small, task oriented and time limited. They are created as needed, for example to agree minimum standards and formulate appropriate technical practices, and they advise the SAG. TWiGs are coordinated by a focal point or technical adviser, and are composed of relevant technical experts.

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50 Final Summary and Action Points, IASC Principals meeting, 13 December 2011, recommendation 29.
51 Depending on the context, RC/RC representatives may prefer to be invitees.
8 Minimum Commitments for Participation in Clusters

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. The purpose is not to exclude organizations from participating in clusters. Nor should they impede efforts to secure the full participation of national authorities in cluster coordination, where appropriate.

CLAs have a reciprocal responsibility to ensure that they lead clusters in a manner that goes beyond simply sharing information, and provide effective coordination with their sub-national counterparts. The responsibility of CLAs, and Cluster Coordinators, is to provide a forum for strategic response that meets affected people’s needs and feeds into other levels of strategic response (for example, inter-cluster coordination at global level).

All cluster partners (including CLAs in their role as implementer alongside other agencies) have a shared mutual responsibility to assist affected people swiftly and effectively in the course of achieving the SRP and its strategic objectives.

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. The commitments are a starting point and should be considered as an absolute minimum. Country-level clusters should base themselves on this document when the develop or update their ToRs and commitments.

The minimum commitments for participation in clusters include:

1. Commitment to humanitarian principles, the Principles of Partnership and 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. Readiness to participate in actions that specifically improve accountability to affected people, in line with the IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations and the related Operational Framework.
3. A demonstrated understanding of the duties and responsibilities associated with membership of the cluster, as defined by IASC ToRs and guidance notes, any cluster-specific guidance, and country cluster ToRs, where available.
4. Active participation in the cluster and a commitment to consistently engage in the cluster’s collective work.
5. Capacity and willingness to contribute to the cluster’s strategic response plan and activities, which must include inter-cluster coordination.

53 These include the values of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility, and complementarity. See: www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org.
54 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.
55 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. Commitment to mainstream key programmatic cross-cutting issues (including age, gender, environment and HIV/AIDs).
7. Commitment from a relevant senior staff member to engage consistently in the cluster to fulfil its mission.
8. Commitment to work cooperatively with other cluster partners to ensure an optimal and strategic use of available resources, and share information on organizational resources.
9. Willingness to take on leadership responsibilities in sub-national or working groups as needed, subject to capacity and mandate.
10. Undertake advocacy, and disseminate advocacy and advocacy messages to affected communities, the host Government, donors, the HCT, CLAs, the media and other audiences.
11. Ensure that the cluster provides interpretation (in an appropriate language) so that all partners in cluster are able to participate, including local organizations (and national and local authorities where appropriate).
9 Sub-National Coordination

Sub-national coordination occurs when national coordination is decentralized and clusters or sectors are established in zones of special operational importance. Structures may be established at more than one administrative level if required (in both provinces and districts, for example, as in Pakistan), though it remains a firm underlying principle that structures should be minimized. Sub-national coordination is critical when responses take place in remote areas (such as Sudan) or extend over a large territory (as in DRC).

Humanitarian operations that employ national and sub-national clusters have been found to be more effective than ones that coordinate by means of a single national cluster. Though sub-national coordination structures may vary across regions, they should facilitate decentralized decision-making and enhance response time. They are also in a better position to

- Adapt standards to local circumstances.
- Work closely with local authorities and international, national and local NGOs.
- Implement the strategic plan, and cross-cutting and multidimensional issues.
- Strengthen accountability to affected people.

Assessment and strategic planning start at the sub-national level. Different regions may have different needs and therefore different strategic objectives and prioritization.

The establishment of sub-national clusters should be formalized in ToRs, which should be endorsed by the national CLA. ToRs should be framed in terms of clusters’ core functions and define national and sub-national accountability clearly. Inter-cluster coordination at sub-national level may require dedicated support. In some instances, a sub-national HCT (with cluster representation) has replaced an inter-cluster.56

Within the limits of available resources and taking account of the operational context, sub-national clusters should have full- or part-time Cluster Coordinators. Sub-national clusters also offer opportunities for humanitarian partners and national authorities to share cluster leadership.

It has been found that, in some instances, more capacity and seniority are needed at sub-national level, closer to operations, than at national level; clusters at capital level have not always been needed.57 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 where local capacity is sufficient to coordinate in that area.

National-level clusters should provide support and policy direction to sub-national clusters. The links between sub-national and national clusters should:

- Facilitate reporting, information-sharing and collaboration with national 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.
- Assist the emergence of longer term advocacy and programming strategies.

To enable operational decisions to be decentralized and ensure coherence, ToRs should establish clear lines of accountability between national and sub-national clusters. Sequencing should also be addressed: national meetings should take place after sub-national ones, and both should produce a reliable record of decisions and debates.

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

Evaluations and research have found that, when clusters share leadership between UN, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other key humanitarian actors, including IOM, they tend to improve partnerships, advocacy and information. 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 equitably 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. Shared forms of leadership, when they are appropriate and transparent, reflect the fact that humanitarian actors depend on one another to manage a crisis and meet the needs of affected people.

In all contexts, sharing leadership require those involved actors to go beyond minimum norms of participation and implementation and to define together clear and well-understood leadership roles and responsibilities. when developing ToRs, it is vital at every level to examine and break down the leadership role that is to be shared, and its accompanying responsibilities. ToRs should address the complementary roles of CLAs, Cluster Coordinators and cluster participants, and make clear to all parties how accountability, strategy, representation, advocacy, fundraising, and other key issues, will be managed.

The Global Logistics Cluster seconds NGO staff with specialized skills to the global cluster support cell. They can be deployed from there 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 handing over to another in a planned manner. The Emergency Shelter Cluster has adopted "phased leadership" for natural disasters since 2006. Different agencies lead the cluster for different phases of the response. (For example, an agency like IFRC, which has expertise in emergencies and surge capacity, leads during the emergency and transitional phases, while agencies like UN-Habitat, which have development expertise, take over during the recovery phase.) Other learning can be found within the CCCM and Education clusters.

When considering sharing 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 and responsibilities, and accountabilities. Examples of different ToRs are available online. Those involved should jointly determine the shared leadership model that works best for the context they are in.

58 Subject to the mandates of the three different components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.
59 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.
60 At: http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info; other clusters (including CCCM and Education) are sources of ToRs.
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.61

3. Many terms are used to describe shared leadership: co-facilitator, co-coordinator, co-
steward, co-lead, sub-cluster coordination, sub-national leadership, work group
membership, task force chairs, secondment. It would be helpful to harmonize this
language and Global CLAs and HCTs are encouraged to provide guidance.

1. Though there are difficulties in some cases, a goal in any response is to assist
national Governments to fulfil their responsibilities to their people. Those in shared
leadership roles should help to build national capacity.

2. Effective shared leadership has transactional costs, in workload and financially.
Resource partners, the RC/HC and the HCT should ensure that funding is not a
obstacle for agencies that wish to share cluster leadership. Where it can, the HC/HCT
should help to mobilize funds for shared leadership; in other countries, donor support
should be encouraged.62

3. 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 a sufficient number of qualified staff are placed in
leadership positions.

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

5. 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.

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61 The 2008 definition of Provider of Last Resort (POLR) was revised by the IASC Principals in December 2011
to read: “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 fulfill critical gaps identified by the cluster
and reflected in the HC-led HCT Strategic Response Plan” (revision underlined).

62 The Framework on Cluster Coordination Costs and Functions in Humanitarian Emergencies at Country 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".
11 Monitoring Cluster Coordination

Cluster coordination aims to strengthen the organization of the international humanitarian community and make it more accountable to affected people. Recognizing that weak leadership and poor coordination fatally undermine the quality of a humanitarian response, the Transformative Agenda stated that cluster coordination should be monitored at country level to strengthen coordination, performance, and participation.

This section discusses monitoring of cluster coordination; the same mechanisms apply to emergency sector coordination.63

Monitoring cluster coordination refers to three different processes:

1. **Cluster Coordination Configurations** are snapshots of cluster/sector coordination, response structures and selected key deliverables.
2. **Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CPM)** is a self-assessment of cluster performance in terms of the six core cluster functions (see Section 4) and accountability to affected people.
3. **A Cluster Coordination Architecture Review** examines the continued appropriateness and relevance of cluster coordination structures.

Monitoring cluster coordination at national and sub-national level in sudden onset and protracted crises is necessary to ensure that clusters are efficient and effective coordination mechanisms, which 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 should transition to emergency or recovery coordination structures that are led or supported nationally, wherever possible. Monitoring also ensures that the architecture of coordination reflects changes in the context and in coordination needs.

It is important to demonstrated the value that coordination structures add, both for accountability, and to justify their cost.

**Cluster Coordination Configurations** provide a snapshot of clusters’ coordination structures, and shows how they operate and interact with partners in a given country. They also indicate whether selected key deliverables are present or not, such as strategic plans and exit strategies. Cluster Coordination Configuration sheets give clusters, the HC/HCT, and headquarters’ offices an overview of cluster structures. In-country analysis can indicate at a glance areas of strength and areas that require attention.

OCHA country offices work together with cluster and sector coordinators to complete the sheets. At global level, OCHA compiles the information and makes it available online.64 To keep the information as up to date as possible, snapshots are compiled every six months (beginning and mid-year). An example of a Cluster Coordination Configuration is below.

**Illustrative example of a cluster configuration**

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63 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 **ADD ADD ADD**.

64 At: [http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/home/table](http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/home/table).
Cluster performance monitoring (CPM) is a self-assessment of cluster performance in terms of the six core cluster functions (see Section 4) and accountability to affected populations. It is a country-led process, supported globally. Ideally, the process is carried out by all clusters/sectors at the same time but can be implemented on demand by individual clusters.

Complimentary to humanitarian response monitoring (which measures progress towards the objectives of the SRP), cluster performance monitoring evaluates cluster functions to ensure that they are adequately implemented to support the delivery of the shared response.

The CPM enables all cluster partners and coordinators to identify strengths and weaknesses of performance and paths to improvement.

**The four steps of a CPM process**

1. **Planning**
   A preparatory cluster meeting explains the process and its objectives, decides how it will be implemented, sets a timetable, and agrees on the scope for the assessment (only at national level or also at sub-national level(s)).

2. **Self-Assessment**
   Cluster Coordinators and cluster partners (including cross-cutting issue focal points) complete anonymous self-assessment questionnaires. These address the six core cluster functions and accountability to affected people. The cluster coordinator fills out the form for the cluster description.

   **Output**: A Preliminary Performance Report displays an analysis of questionnaire responses by cluster. A cluster description that includes information on the cluster architecture and on the availability of key outputs linked to the cluster functions.

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65 Humanitarian response monitoring, as defined by the humanitarian programme cycle reference module, is a continuous process that records the aid delivered to an affected population as well as the results achieved. It tracks the inputs and the outputs resulting from interventions to affected populations; charts the outcomes of cluster activities; and measures progress towards the objectives of the SRP, while considering the affected population’s perspective of the response with regards to timeliness of delivery, use and access to services.

66 The IASC SWG on the Cluster Approach developed an online questionnaire for the CPM which can be used in-country with Global Cluster/OCHA support. It includes agreed questions related to core functions and accountability. It is strongly encouraged to use the same questions to support comparison, both cross-cluster and across countries.
3. Discussions

(a) Cluster level. The partners in each cluster discuss the findings of the Preliminary Performance Report and the cluster description, and put them in context. The Cluster agrees an action plan to improve areas identified for strengthening, a timetable, and responsibility for follow-up.

Outputs.

(i) A Cluster Description, and Final Performance Report including an Action Plan are produced. The Action Plan prioritises improvement actions, including a timeframe for implementation, and identifies the focal points responsible for following-up.

Use at Inter-cluster level. Cluster Action Plans are shared to identify common areas for improvement which clusters could work on together or which require support from the HC/HCT.

Use at HC/HCT level. Cluster Action Plans are presented to the HC/HCT for review and for their support where needed.

Use at global cluster level. The CPM reports and action plan are also available for the global clusters to analyse if certain countries or cluster functions require global support.

4. Monitoring the Action Plan

Led by the Cluster Coordinator, the cluster takes stock every month of progress in implementing the Action Plan, and reports every quarter to the HC/HCT.

The CPM should ideally be implemented three to six months after the onset of an emergency and annually thereafter. In protracted crises, it is recommended that the CPM is implemented annually, except in cases where core functions have been registered as weak, requiring more frequent monitoring and follow-up. Detailed guidance on the CPM is available online.67

As part of the TA, Principals agreed that, in new emergencies, cluster-coordination structures should be reviewed within three months, like L3 emergencies.68 In protracted crises, they should be reviewed immediately and then annually.69

The cluster coordination architecture review assesses whether clusters remain ‘fit for purpose’ and should remain as they are, be expanded, streamlined, merged or de-activated and are initiated by the RC/HC. Section 3 gives further detail on their rationale and implementation. Such cluster review may be informed by the results of a CPM report, but conclusions on whether a cluster is still ‘fit for purpose’ is based on an analysis of changes in humanitarian context, needs and national coordination capacity. OCHA supports RC/HCs to ensure that reviews at country level are carried out in a timely manner and monitors globally the implementation of reviews.

67 At: http://clusters.humanitarianresponse.info/.
68 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.
69 Recommendation 33, IASC Transformative Agenda: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions (January 2012).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HPC Component</th>
<th>Related Product/Outputs</th>
<th>Examples of Inter-Cluster Elements of Outputs</th>
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<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>• Contingency Plans.</td>
<td>• Analysis of scenarios, and the multi-sectoral nature of the potential response.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Implementation of Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPA).</td>
<td>• Coordination structures, joint needs assessment.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• Contribution to development of SoPs for preparedness emergency response actions.</td>
<td>• Agreement on coordination structures in a crisis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needs assessment</td>
<td>• Contribute to the Preliminary Scenario Definition (PSD).</td>
<td>• Joint analysis of situational and initial needs-assessment information.</td>
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<td>• Contribute to the Multi-cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA).</td>
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<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>• Contribute to the SRP.</td>
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<td>• Contribute to SRP indicators.</td>
<td>• Joint analysis of the multi-sectoral dimension of the response.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identify inter-sectoral synergies to meet strategic response objectives.</td>
<td>• Agreed multi-sectoral indicators.</td>
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<td>• Propose prioritization of response activities.</td>
<td>• Agreed cash transfer solutions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ensure that protection is incorporated across clusters.</td>
<td>• Joint inter-sectoral analysis leading to proposed priorities for response activities.</td>
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<td>• Clarify responsibilities on issues shared between clusters.</td>
<td>• Agreed multi-sectoral approach to protection.</td>
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<td>• Define the inter-sectoral needs that service clusters will provide.</td>
<td>• Agreement on which sectors will plan activities that can be covered by different clusters (healthcare, waste, cash grants...).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Prepare integrated early recovery strategies.</td>
<td>• Agreement on critical shared services, such as logistics.</td>
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<td>• Common approaches on shared early recovery actions, such as cash-based emergency employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Mobilization</td>
<td>• Flash/Consolidated Appeal.</td>
<td>• Agreed proposals for timeline and funding priorities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Pooled/Common Humanitarian Fund applications.</td>
<td>• Agreed process and prioritization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>• Coordinate field activities between clusters to ensure appropriate sequencing or that events are shared to maximize impact.</td>
<td>• Link the timing of activities (vaccinations, nutrition assessments...).</td>
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<td>• Design multi-sectoral interface with affected people.</td>
<td>• Common approaches to cash transfer programmes (value of cash grants...).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identify humanitarian access issues and impacts.</td>
<td>• Agreed multi-sectoral approach to engagement with communities.</td>
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<td>• Joint analysis of impacts.</td>
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<td>• Joint advocacy strategy.</td>
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<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>• Establish and implement joint mechanisms of accountability to affected people.</td>
<td>• Agreed inter-cluster framework for community feedback.</td>
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<td>• Monitor achievement of strategic objectives.</td>
<td>• Joint analysis of multi-sectoral objectives.</td>
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<td>• Joint analysis of markets for cash transfers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational Review/ Evaluation</td>
<td>• Cluster performance monitoring contributes to operational reviews and evaluations.</td>
<td>• Results and actions are shared between clusters to identify common challenges and solutions.</td>
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<td>• CPM contributes to reviews of cluster and sector coordination structures and transition to development coordination structures.</td>
<td>• Agreed approach to reviewing the appropriateness of coordination structures.</td>
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<td>• Agreed approach to engagement with national structures.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAP | Accountability to affected people
AOR | Areas of responsibility
CAP | Consolidated Appeals Process
CERF | Central Emergency Response Fund
CLA | Cluster lead agency
CPM | Cluster performance monitoring
CRP | Contingency response planning
ECHA | Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ERC | Emergency Relief Coordinator

EW | Humanitarian Coordinator
HC | Humanitarian Country Team
HPC | Humanitarian programme cycle
IARRM | Inter-Agency rapid response mechanism
IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFRC | International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM | Information management
IOM | International Organization for Migration
ITA | IASC Transformative Agenda
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
SRP | Strategic Response Plan
SWG | Strategic working group
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

Further Reference
- Framework on Cluster Coordination Costs at the Country Level, May 2011.
- IASC, Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Cluster/Sector Leads and OCHA in Information Management.
- Cluster Lead Agencies Joint Letter on Dual Responsibility, November 2009.
- IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at Country Level.
- Shelter Cluster Evaluations.